THE INDIAN STAGE

VOL. IV.

GIRISH NATYA SANSAD SERIES.

By

HEMENDRANATH DAS GUPTA

First Girish Lecturer, Calcutta University,
Author of Bankim Chandra,
Deshbandhu C. R. Das,
Girish Prativa, Girish Chandra etc.

Dedicated

to

My Wife

Sreemati KIRAN BALA DEVI

Whose Devotion and Co-operation have always been a great help to my literary pursuits.

Author.

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FOREWORD.

The history of the Indian Stage is now complete for the present. Ten years ago, the great orientalist Dr. Joban Van Manen who honoured the writer with a masterly introduction to the first Volume, gave in it a synopsis of the contents of the succeeding ones, and I thank my stars that I have been able to bring out a connected history from the pre-historic period down to the present day. How far I have been successful in my endeavour, it is for my readers to judge.

I can not however bid ferewell to my readers without expressing my deep gratitude to the famous business-magnate Mr. Sachchidanda Bhattacharya whom I have the proud and unique privilege of claiming a former student of mine,—now a famous personality, equally distinguished for the great qualities of both head and heart, without whose kind help, the History—nay more, no other literary work of mine would have seen the light of the day.

I shall also express my thanks to the various persons who have rendered me help in various matters for the present work, notably amongst them to my late lamented friends Babus Kshetro Mohon Mitra, Chunilal Deb, Abinash Chandra Gangulee, Natyacharya Amrita Lal Bose, Aparesh Chandra Mukherjee, Jogesh Chandra Chowdhury and to the living dramatists Babus Manmatha Nath Roy M. A., B. L. and Mohendra Nath Gupta M. A., as also to my esteemed friends Asoka Nath Bhattacharya Vedantatirtha M. A. Rabindra Nath Roy, Satoo Sen, Kiron Chandra Dutt, Akshoy Kali Koer and Nikhilendra Krishna Deb.

I must acknowledge with gratitude that I have been greatly assisted and treated with great consideration in my consistent research work by the Librarian and the whole staff of the Imperial Library.

My thanks also are due to my friends Messrs B. N. Das (late M. H. R. Burmah), P. C. Thomas of St Paul School, J. C. Guha (Professor), Upendra Chandra Das Gupta (Advocate), Kali Das Roy (Poet), Raghunath Dutt of Bholanath Dham, and last and not the least to Mr. Makhanlal Sen, the translator of Ramayana in English and author of Lord Srikrishna, for his literary help. The suggestion and encouragement I received from Srijut Devendranath Bose has already been acknowledged.

Lastly I am very grateful to Mr. Sudhansu Ranjan Sen Gupta Advocate and Proprietor Truth Press who has not only taken personal interest in my work but also for the interest he and the whole staff of the Press have taken in expediting my work and bringing it out successfully.

I am particularly thankful to my friends Mr. A.B. Chatterjee M. A. and Mr. S. N. Sen, B. Com. for the keen interest they took in my work.

The task of bringing out works like the History of the Indian Stage, Bankim Chandra, Girish Chandra, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan is quite Herculean and I think it should receive due recognition from the University and it should see that the writer may be in a position to continue arduous researches unhampered ; though I should admit that it has encouraged me by honouring me as the first Girish Lecturer of the Calcutta University and prescribing "The Indian Stage as a text book for B.A. classes (Sanskritic) for which I heartily acknowledge my grateful thanks to that august body.

124/5B, Russa Road,
Calcutta.
The 26th Sept. 1944.

HEMENDRANATH DAS GUPTA

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THE
INDIAN STAGE

Vol. IV

CHAPTER I.

MINERVA THEATRE

Girish Chandra, as we have seen in the third volume, left the Minerva Theatre which he had himself built, and after that it became practically a dead house.

Before we proceed to discuss further details of the Bengali Stage, we ought to recapitulate the past history and what we propose to do next. The first stage was an attempt on the part of Girish Chandra to stage performances for middle-class gentlemen, how the various performances of "Sadhabar Ekadashi" led to the starting of the National Theatre with Lilabati,

how it next became public and how the Great National Theatre was started in 1873, how actresses were first introduced and how ultimately the Dramatic Performance Act was passed in 1876. Vide Vol : II.

The second stage was the reviving of the National Theatre in 1877, how Girish had to give up service for the benifit of the stage and how the Pouranik dramas beginning with "Rabonbadh" drew spectators in numbers.
Vol : III.

The third was the opening of the Star Theatre at Beadon Street with "Dakshajajna", how it was sanctified by the visit of His Holiness Paramhansa Ramkrishna Deb and Girish's accepting him as his Guru (spiritual preceptor), how the Star Theatre was removed to its present site at Cornwallis Street and the Emerald Theatre was started in its site, how the new Star opened with "Nashiram" and how Girish's social dramas "Profulla" and "Haranidhi" created a new atmosphere for the stage and how it showed also the germ of national dramas in "Chanda". Vol : III.

The fourth stage is the later development of the stage when the classical dramas of Girish Chandra—Macbeth, Jana, Mukul Munjara,

Karametibai, Kalapahar, Mayabashan, Pandava Gourava etc. created a new era for the Bengali Theatre. Vol : III (1883-1900).

The fifth and the most glorious stage will be described in this volume when nationalism in all aspects—in patriotism and religion, in culture and philanthrophy—was the chief theme of the Bengali stage and the high class dramas —"Sitaram", "Satnam", "Serajuddulla" and "Mirkasim", "Rana Protap", "Mewar Patan", "Nandakumar" and "Chhatrapati Sivaji" dealing with historical matters, "Balidan", "Sasti Ki Santi", "Grihalakshi" depicting social problems and "Raja Asoka", "Sankarachariya" and "Topobal" inculcating philosophical truths adorned the Bengali Stage as a University of Art and Culture. It was at the Minerva Theatre that most of the dramas under this head were staged in the earliest period of the twentieth century viz. 1900-1912 and the period thus marks a glorious era of the Bengali Stage with that Theatre. We thus propose to follow the ups and downs of the Minerva Theatre with details which are necessary, although they may prove now and again a bit tiring and complex.

By the time Girish left in 1896, half of the Minerva Theatre had already been mortgaged to

one Promotha Nath Das on a conditional sale. As the Theatre drew no more any enthusiastic spectators and sales became low, Nagen Babu allowed the City Theatre to stage its performances here *. As it was not to the liking of Promotha Das, the latter with the help of Babu Chuni Lal Deb and his brother Nikhil Babu cleared the "City" of Minerva. The City left in May 1896 and the proceedings it instituted in court to bring the Deb Brothers and Girish Chandra to book, failed.

Chuni Babu was practically managing the Minerva and it is he, as we shall see, who by his tact and efforts reconstructed the Minerva. He could not, however, make any head-way at the time, although such brilliant artists Ardhendu Mustafi, Mohendra Bose, Miss Tincourie were with him. A few worthless pieces as "Jubilee Jajna", "Srikrishner Balya Lila" and "Jivanta Protima" were only staged. Advertisment-Manager—Durgadas Dey's 'Law Babu' was a bit entertaining. Mr. Dey gained some influence and secured two lessees P. C. Bose and his brother J. K. Bose without the consent of Chuni Babu. The latter left for the Classic in disgust. In March 1898, Promotha Das actually became half partner of Minerva.

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* Formerly it showed at Beena. Vide Page 166 Vol: III.

During the Puja (October) 1898, the party went to Bagerhat (Dist : Khulna). Sales were low there and the party had to sell scenes for passage money for return. The purchasers were Babus Beni Roy and Atul Roy who afterwards played an important part in the later history of Minerva.

In December 1898, Bose brothers surrendered the lease, their losses being great, and two Dutts—Amritalal Dutt alias Habu Dutt and Surendra Dutt alias Tamu Dutt became lessee in the benami of Haru Mullick. They being cousins of Swami Vivekananda, Girish (who had left the Classic owing to some difference) at the former's request took much interest in them, lending even his name for a few nights as manager, though without any monetary gain. Chuni Babu came back from Classic and became the de-facto manager of the Minerva again.

In February 1899, Girish was requested by the Maharaja Sir Monidra Chandra Nandi of Cassimbazar to take his party there and show some performances under the name of Minerva Theatre at the marriage ceremony of his eldest daughter.

It was against principle of Girish to appear as an actor in a private house, but since the Maharaja was a highly cultured and a pious man

and was widely known for his boundless charity and simplicity of manners, Girish accepted the invitation. Chuni Babu helped him in gathering the artists. "Sadhabar Ekadashi" "Chaitanya Lila" and "Profulla" were staged, besides some farces. Mustafi also accompanied the party and his Madan-Dada and Jiban Chandra delighted all *.

Girish was not, however, hopeful of the present condition of Minerva and got scent of truobles too. In the meantime, Amarendra Nath gave him the offer of joining Classic as Dramatic Director, which he accepted.

Messrs. Beni Roy and Atul Roy now came to the field. Babu Narendra Nath Sarkar, the minor Zemindar of Sripur was in their control and was induced by them to take the lease of the Minerva. But there was already a lease in the benami of Haru Mullick, the Dutt brothers being the defacto lessee. In their absence Haru Mallick was taken by Durga Das Dey to their house and made to surrender the lease. The half partner Promotha Das helped in the move and Durga Das became the manager.

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* Some idea of the Maharaja's appreciation of Girish's part of Jogesh may be gleaned from Girish's essay "Bahurupy Bidya".

Babu Mohendra Mitra, Advocate High Court was the legal advisor of Sarkar. Dutts were now served with a notice to quit and Chuni Babu too had to leave.

"Sree", "Madalasha" and "Kishore Sadhan" were now shown with the help of the powerful actress Susilabala of whom we shall speak later.

Sarkar was merely the lessee but now came an opportunity for him to become the owner of the theatre.

It was at this time a suit was pending for arrears of rent of the land against Nagen Mukherjee and Promotha Das, and in the decree passed in favour of Mohendra Das, the owner of the land, the theatre was sold on auction and Sarkar was advised to purchase it : but since he was a minor, it was done in the name of Mohendra Mitter. To become the proprietor of the Minerva, Sarkar had to mortgage his considerable properties and Mohendra Babu too paid him Rs. 10,000/- by borrowing it from the Khulna Loan Office through the help of Beni Ray. The trio—Mohendra Babu, Beni and Atul Babu, were the real masters of the situation and Sarkar was a mere tool in their hands.

Durgadas De's services were next dispensed

with, and "Madhabi Kankan" (R. C. Dutt's) was staged on the 10th March 1900, Sushila playing the part of Jelakha admirably.

Mohendra Babu was a highly cultured man and had knowledge not only about drama and art but also about business. He had high regards for Girish Chandra and advised Sarkar to secure his services at all cost.

Girish was at this time the Dramatic Director of the Classic and his "Pandova Gourava" as we saw before, was creating a sensation there. There were, however, some differences about the amount and payment of his salary. He now joined the Minerva Theatre and came to his own home on Rs. 250 a month with a bonus of Rs. 1000.

The sensation of Minerva now was the staging of "Sitaram," a dramatic version of Bankim Chandra's famous novel.

"Sitaram" was an independent Hindu chief of Bengal in Bhushna (Faridpur), during the time of Aurangzeb. By his own effort he founded a kingdom at Mahmudpur (Jessore) on the other side of the Madhumati river, but lost it in his struggle with the Mohamedans. Although not an original drama, the episode of a hero of Bengal for the first time kindled a feeling

of love for the country in the hearts of the Bengalis and "Sitaram" may therefore be called the first national drama of the period and the fore-runner of "Pratapaditya" and "Banga Vikram" (Kedar Roy) ,the other national heroes of Bengal. Bankim Chandra in the monthly issue "Prachara" wrote the novel in series in 1884. There for the first time even before the Indian National Congress was started, he advocated Hindu Mussulman unity in the mouth of Chandsha Fakeer. This portion of the conversation between the Fakir and Sitaram is, however, absent in the novel (published in book-form), but Girish all the same introduced this in th drama and caught ethe imagination of the audience.

Then again Girish introduced many new things and inserted a few songs which highly enhanced the interest of the play. For example, the conversation between Ramchand and Shamchand does not excite any sympathy for Sitaram and the last chapter of the novel rather ends quite abruptly. The last scene in the drama, however, ends with a long conversation between Sitaram and Sree as one full of tension and was quite in keeping with Bankim's view-point that the last independent Raja of Bengal fell not owing to his

own fault but for circumstances which he was powerless to control. The newly-added scenes made the drama very enjoyable.

Now to play the part of Sree, required an actress of great talent like Tincouri. This was also arranged. Tincouri was then at the "Classic" and the management was able to secure her services. The part of Joyanti the Sanyasinee who takes away Sree from the kingdom of her husband, was played to a finish by Sushilabala. Her make-up, dialogues and songs were highly enchanting, specially as the songs composed by Girish for the occasion were of a superior order. Indeed Joyanti was practically the starting point of the most brilliant career of Sushila. Tincourie and Sushila added to the interest and diginity of the play and fully supported Girish Chandra in the main role which, to say the least, was superb in representation.

In fact Bankim's "Sitaram" could not better be represented on the stage as was this time done with Girish and other artists coached at his direction. *

* It was the ardent desire of Bankim Chandra that his novels be truly represented by Girish Chandra, but circumstances intervened. Fourteen years after Bankim first expressed his desire, Girish now carried it into effect.

Dani Babu's part of Gongaram too was highly successful. Chuni Babu and Nikhil Babu were kept as understudy for Girish Chandra and Dani Babu.

The other characters were as follows :—

Chandra Choor	...	Aghorh Pathak.
Mrinmoy	...	Prea Nath Ghose.
Shaha Fakeer	...	Kali Charan Banerjee.
Gongadhar Swami	...	Thakur Das Chatterjee.
Chand Shaha	...	Kedar Nath Das.
Fousdar's brother-in-law	...	Angus.
do flatterer	...	Nilmani Ghose.
Peari Lall	...	Kunja Chakravorty.
Chandal	...	Chuni Deb.
Nonda	...	Sorojini.
Rama	...	Pontu Rani.
Murala	...	Sudheera Bala (Patal)
Maid servant	...	Hingan Bala (Hena)

Girish was here for a few months only and within that time besides rendering the novel into drama wrote a melo-dramatic piece "Moni Haran" (the story being taken from Sreemad Bhagabad) consisting in the mysterious disappearance of a famous gem-Shyiamantak—and the marriage of Satyabhama. This was followed by "Nanda Dulal." He also appeared as Jogesh, Neemchand, Vidushak, and Keechak with Tincouri as Jeevananda,

Kanchan, Jana and Draupadi in the various dramas of fame.

Amarendra Nath was very much enraged and began to baffle Girish in two ways. First he applied to the High Court praying for an injunction to restrain Girish from serving in Sarkar's Theatre, during the continuance of Girish's agreement with him till March 26, 1902. Mr. Justice Sale, however, discharged the rule and refused to give any relief to Amarendra * remarking that the breach was committed by the plaintiff by non-payment of Rs. 3,000/- as the conditions of the agreement had been broken by Dutt himself.

Amarendra Nath's next move was to show performances of *Sitaram* in competition with the Minerva, commencing on the 30th June, 1900. † There were placards and cartoons (e.g. Nata, Nartaki, Napita—actor, harlot and

* Messrs. Jackson and W. C. Banerjee appeared for Dutt, and Sir Griffith Evans and Mr. Garth for Girish Chandra.

† Cast—

Sitaram	...	Amarendra.
Sree	...	Kusum Kumari.
Nonda	...	Promoda.
Roma	...	Chhotarani.
Joyanti	...	Bhusan Kumari.

barber become useless after 40 ; weighing scales, the side with Girish going up and that with Amarendra going down and the like) issued by Classic eulogising Dutt and belittling Girish. These were as mean and vulgar and were all one-sided. Contrast these with the sportsmanlike dignity of Star-proprietors during the contest of *Profulla* performance in 1895 !

Nothing however could harm Girish. In the performance, too, Amarendra had to give way very soon. Except the part of Gongaram which was acted most marvellously by Mohendra Bose—the last original part Mohendra Babu appeared in, † others were as candles to incandescent lamps. To the various attacks of Dutt, the only dignified reply from the Minerva was—"It has been said that there is a difference of Heaven and Hell ! Aye ! Let us hope so at least."

Thus baffled both in stage and Court, Amarendranath staged a scandalous farce "Theatre" from the 25th August 1900, caricaturing Girish and rediculing Narendra Sarkar, Beni Roy and Mahendra Mitra as Bangals ‡, since they

† Mohendra Babu died in March 1901.

‡ *Bangal*—Used generally as an expression of contempt in reference to people of East Bengal by those who live in Upper Bengal.

hailed from Khulna and Barisal. This scurrilous piece too did not add to the dignity of the stage at all.

As to the kind of acting that was practised by Amarendra Nath and others of the period we should say a little. He had a good and sonorous voice and his physique was very good. He attained great popularity but with great display of voice, real art suffered greatly with him. People both on the stage and outside, in professional and amateur parties used now to practise the same kind of technique, and competition proceeded on this display of voioe alone. At Girish Chandra's direction for the first time however appeared a protest to this kind of acting, thus :—

> "Our representation, we feel bold to say, will prove to them that *howling is not acting and that such a subject atonce* serious and sublime ought not to be handled by quacks who will unscrupulously lay their hands on the most complicated cases without possessing the requisite qualification of even a common-place amateur." *

Ideals of Theatre no doubt suffered greatly at the hands of Amarendra but to Girish,

* Vide Amarendra's biography by Dutt, page 270.

Naren Sarkar too was no better stuff. He was vain and wanted to become an actor and dramatist. As he possessed no qualification for either, Girish had to disappoint him, and the result was the separation. The last part Girish played was in the role of Neemchand on October 19, 1900.

No sooner Amarendra heard of this, than he paid to Girish all possible respects and by offering many apologies took him to his theatre, the announcement by him (6th Agrahayan 1307) running as follows—

> "I have no difference now with the great Girish Chandra. He has taken me to his affectionate embrace. It was an act of folly on my part to have offended so august a person"......

From October 20, 1900 Girish's name as Manager of the Minerva Theatre dropped off but Tincourie and Chuni Babu remained there. Mustafi too was in the Minerva. Differences however arose between Atul Roy and Mohendra Mitra, and when the latter was threatened with a suit for Loan Office debt standing in his name, artists threatened a strike. Atul Roy's services were now dispensed with and he joined the Classic.But from this place too, he spared no means to harrass Mitra and Sarkar and at last

finding no means of safety, Naren Sarkar applied for insolvency in 1902.

Minerva Theatre was now without a lessee and there was no play ; but to run on the theatre, an order of the Court was necessary. Babu Mohendra Mitter then got the mortgagee in the person of Chinmoyi Devi—wife of Late Satyadhan Mukerjee (nephew to Mr. W. C. Bonerjee) mortgagee of the house for Rs. 30000/- to file a suit for the appointment of a receiver. Mr. Shelly Bonerjee (son of Mr. W. C. Bonerjee) was appointed Receiver, and immediately he issued notices on the 22nd July 1903 to the effect that lease would be given to the highest bidder, provided he deposited Rs, 5,000/-. Offers came from many and eventually Babu Veni Bhusan Roy and Preo Nath Das were made lessee who agreed to pay Rs. 620/- a month as rent. Mohendra Babu helped them with a loan of Rs. 5,000/ giving the cheque immediately.

Now in 1903, Amarendra took Sub-lease of the Minerva too offering a sum of Rs. 10,000/- as also a monthly rent of Rs. 700/-, under Veni Roy and Preo Nath Das. He now opened the Minerva after it had remained closed for a year and a half. He appeared in the title role in Kshirode Prasad's drama *Rughubeer* and his part was very ably performed.

Although the play * was a great success and his part created a great impression, it was however not possible for Dutt to run both the Classic and Minerva in that financial strain, he was put to at that time. On this side again, the Star Theatre was having packed-up houses with *Pratapaditya*, and the *Unique*, too, established a position with Dani Babu, Tara Sundari and others. So from December, 1903, to March, 1904, he could not make much headway.

Now came Mr. Monmohan Pandey in the field—a man who became a prominent theatre-owner afterwards. Amarendra used to borrow now and again from him for the Classic. To clear the money, Amarendra sold him the sales of female seats for 8 days during X'mas.

Further troubles awaited Amarendra. For the rent of the Classic theatre due to Messrs. Belchamber & Co., the receivers to the estate of Gopal Lal Seal, Pandey had to advance a sum of Rs. 2,000/- also. For all debts Amarendra transferred the lease of the Classic to Pandey.

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* Cast—	Raghubeer	... Amarendra
	Anant Rao	... Radhamadhab Kar
	Dulia	... Preonath Ghosh
	Debal	... Handu Babu
	Shamali	... Punturani
	Paribanu	... Blackie

The deed, however, was not to be registered within three months and an opportunity was given to Dutt to repay the money within that time, which, as will be seen he did.

In March. 1904

Amar Babu's Classic was invited to show some performances at Dacca by the Nawab Bahadoor (Nawab Salimulla) on the occasion of the visit of Lord Curzon, the then Viceory of India. Amar Babu took his Minerva party with him and showed performances in the name of the Classic. On this occasion, too, he had to borrow some money,—Dacca on the other hand did not pay him profusely. There was some difference with the party and Chuni Babu, and from the Ry. Station on his way to Calcutta Amarendra sent a letter of dismissal to the whole party, which was still then staying at Dacca. The party had to return with money secured by mortgaging some ornaments of the actress Puntorani.

On return, Chuni Babu threatened Amar Babu with a suit for declaration of the latter as an insolvent. Messrs. Beni Roy, Preo Das,

* Some scenes from Hariraj were shown to the Viceory. After that, during the Dol, a pavilion was built at Armenitola.

Mohendra Babu and Mr. Pandey dissuaded him from doing that. An arrangement was next entered into between Amar Babu and Chuni Babu, that Chuni Babu was to manage the Minerva as best as he could, but would give the sale proceeds of the female seats only, to Amar Babu.

March—July, 1904.

Chuni Babu now began to manage the Minerva for Amar Babu and in this he was most materially assisted by Babu Kshetro Mohan Mitra. Mohendra Babu gave a loan of Rs. 200 to begin with. Beni Babu was with them and Girish Chandra, too, lent his name for two nights as Manager.

After a few performances—Raza O Rani*, Nondo Vidayaya, *Madhabi Kankan*, † Chuni Babu put up "Sansar" a social drama by Monomohan Goswami for rehearsal.

* Raja—Montu Babu, Kumar Sen——Kshetro Mohan Mitra, Debdutt—Handu Babu, Sumitra--Chhotrarani, Ila—Kusum (Bishad).

† After finishing his part at Classic, Amarendra Nath came to supervise Minerva. Finding that the hero (Narendra) was late, he himself appeared as Narendra and was highly praised by the author Mr. Dutt who was present at the performance.

Minerva having lost its previous prestige was now and again tortured by gundas, (ruffians) also. But Chuni Babu was too strong for them and Minerva under his able management began to flourish again, though at very slow steps.

Rehearsals of "Sansar" continued. The story of the "Sansar" relates how the wife of a young graduate was compelled to book for Assam and work as a female cooly in a tea-plantation there. The cruelties of a young Saheb as contrasted with the kindness of the senior proprietor—the Burra Saheb, the pathetic descriptions of the hero, Prionath, his wife and sister, the serio-comic acting of Nabokhura and Haru master, with the villainy of Ramendra and Bama and the faithful devotion of the old servent, all together, as a basket of five flowers, made the drama interesting. The cast was thus distributed for the rehearsals :—

Prionath	...	Dani Babu.
Barasaheb	...	Chuni Babu.
Chota Saheb	...	Khetro Babu.
Naba Khura	...	Kali Bonarjee.
Bama	...	Bidal Hari.
Protiva	...	Sorojini.
Saraju	...	Kusum (Bisad).

Dani Babu however did not remain, as the distribution of share-system would not suit him.

The author himself, Babu Monomohan Goswami B. A., now appeared in the role and Satis Banerjee as Nabo Khuro. From the first night the play proved lucky.

Minerva was rising no doubt but Amarendra was still the lessee. But further troubles awaited him.

On April 30, 1904 Girish Chandra's "Satnam" was put on boards at the Classic Theatre. It is one of the most powerful national dramas with tense emotions but on the second night some of the Mohomedans misunderstanding the spirit of the play created a row and the sales were much affected. Tension became high and Moulvi Muzibar Rahaman (afterwards a Congress-leader) with two others, saw Girish Chandra and represented the feelings of their community. Both Girish and Amarendra out of deference to their feelings stopped further performance, although they did not fail to convey that the drama really favoured Hindu-Mussalman unity. The stopping of "Satnam" at the Classic after three nights, proved favourable to the Minerva and people disappointed at the Classic began to crowd in the neighbouring Theatre—Minerva.

Amarendranath thus got a severe set back at the Classic. Added to this, Mr. Pandey

began to press for money due to him. Amarendra had still his right at Minerva, but unable to bear the burden of troubles and debts, he at last transferred his right and interest of Minerva to Mr. Pandey on the 20th July, 1904.

Amarendranath's connection with Minerva ceased from this date.

After this, Pandey allowed Chunilal Deb who had so long acted on behalf of Amarendra, to proceed on with the theatre on his responsibility. The arrangement was that Deb was simply to pay Rs. 700/- a month as rent but in all other matters he was to be independent of Pandey. His name was now announced as proprietor in papers. He was a strict disciplinarian, and began to mature plans to make Minerva Theatre worth its name. Soon an opportunity was also offered to him.

He was very friendly with Babu Upendra Nath Mukherjee, proprietor of the Basumati House. Upendra Babu had published the works of the illustrious poets Michael Medhusudan Dutt, Dinabandhu Mitter, Girish Chandra and others. He had large number of books still lying undisposed of, in the go-down. A novel device was hit upon by Chuni Babu to make Minerva popular. He planned to

distribute the works to the holders of tickets. The arrangement was that Upendra Babu was to supply books but would receive half of the sale proceeds of tickets. Advertisement-cost was to be paid by him. This proved a successful adventure. On the first night i.e., 22nd August 1904, when Nadoo Vidyaya, Lakshan Borjan were staged, the sale proceeds amounted to Rs. 1,800/-and similarly on the following nights. Minerva now commanded packed-up houses and used to collect Rs. 800/- to 900/- per night in place of Rs 50/- or Rs.60/- as it used to get before.

The prestige of theatre no doubt deteriorated with this outside help for its upkeep, but this gave a great push to Minerva and if it could rise hereafter, it was only due to the start Chuni Babu gave.

The success of the Minerva through the presentation of books made Amarendra Nath impatient and he also followed the paths of Chuni Babu at the Classic. He was certainly not jealous,—he was too liberal to be envious of anybody,—but he thought he must not lag behind in competition. He arranged with the "Hitabadi" publication and began to distribute even "Sabda Kalpa Druma"—the most valuable Lexicon

in Sanskrit literature. This involved severe expenditure and Amarendra Nath was practically reduced to a state of bankruptcy. The result proved disastrous for the "Classic", and we shall speak of it later on.

Thus when Minerva prospered, up came Pandey to take interest though we have seen he had no other concern except that he was entitled to the rent of Rs. 700/- a month from his sub-lessee Chuni Babu. Babu Mohendra Mitra who had been taking a keen interest in the threatre from before the time of Naren Srakar was a friend and relative of Chuni Babu too. He advised Chunilal to keep the money with a banker or financier who would advance in cases of emergency and suggested the name of Monomohon Pandey and henceforth Chuni Babu used to keep all money with Pandey, and used to consult Mitter and Pandey in all matters. Now when Minerva was making its mark, each of them suggested a percentage for the other, 3 p.c. for Pandey and 2 for Mitter. To this Chuni Babu could not agree and it created trouble for him.

In the mean time, Chuni Babu secured good artists including even Mustafi, Tara Sundari and

others and put on board "Aindrila" * a drama from the author of "Rezia", on the 5th November, 1904. The story taken from poet Hem Chandra's "Vritra Sanhar" relates how Vritra (Asura) was routed by the gods. There was no dearth of money now, and the company got new scenes, dresses &c, necessary for the performance. The public, however, did not appreciate the play and the sale-proceeds ranged between Rs. 250/- and Rs. 350/- only.

They next staged "Nildurpan" with Ardhendu Sekhar as Torap and Wood, Khetro Babu as Mr. Rogue, Nabin Madhob—Chuni Babu, Tara Sundari—Sabitri, Khetromoni—Bishad Kusum. The play was really a success.

Another book in which the casts deserved high praise was that of Bankim's "Kapal Kundala" where the artists acquitted themselves creditably, specially the two—Chuni Babu as

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Cast—Chuni Babu ... Vritra.
Nikhil „ ... Rudrapir.
Khettro „ ... Kartic (he played Rudrapeer on the 1st night).
Tara Sundari ... Aindrila.
Hinganbala ... Sachi.
Montu Babu ... Indra.
Handu Babu ... Joyanta.
Aparesh Babu ... Surya.

Kapalik and Tarasundari as Moti Bibi. Chuni Babu's appearance, gestures and voice represented the Kapalik correctly and he could be classed with Motisur in his famous role

About this time Chuni Babu, feeling very much the want of good dramas and to restore Minerva to its former position, arranged to bring Girish Chandra on 350/- a month. It was at this time that rehearsal for the performance of Pratapaditya was proceeding with the following cast—

Protap	...	Chuni Babu
Sankar	...	Aparesh „
Bhabananda	...	Handu Babu
Rodda and Bikramaditya	...	Mustafi Saheb
Gobinda Roy	...	Khetro Mohan Mitra
Basanta Roy	...	Palit.
Kalyani	...	Tara Sundari
Bijoya	...	Kironbala
Chhota Rani	...	Sarojini
Sundar	...	Montu Babu.
Govinda Das	...	Mohini Mohan

It was staged on the 20th December 1904, and Chui Babu did his part creditably. During X'mas Chuni Babu's "Naseeb" was played, but Mr. Ardhendu Mustafi's "Bhgaban Bhoot" proved a still-born play.

The success of Chuni Babu and his unwillingness to pay 5% more on gross sales brought him into collision with Panday, who had, however, the artists on his side,—probably because he was in charge of finance. The immediate cause of rupture was the scanty supply of betels at Maldah, where company went on a call. There was no written paper in Chuni Babu's favour, and he had to be satisfied with Rs. 1,000/- only on settlement. Thus his connection ceased with Minerva, for which he had worked so hard. He planted the tree and did his utmost for its growth, but when it began to bear the fruit of his labour, he was not allowed to enjoy it. It is said, some artists had grudge aginst him in his selection of parts and payment was not satisfactory. Whatever might be the cause, the Minerva Theatre owes a deep debt of obligation to Chuni Babu for its reconstruction.

Fortune now installed Mr. Pandey on the vacant seat of the real builder.

CHAPTER II

MINERVA & GIRISH

After Chuni Babu's departure, Babu Aparesh Chandra Mukerjee was made the Manager. Mr. Mustafi was the master from before, Girish Chandra the dramatic director.

But one thing for the stage needs constant repetition. However efficient the staff may be, a theatre can not go on without proper supply of dramas and the newly organised Minerva too would have shared the same fate, had it not been continually fed by dramas from Girish's pen. In the few years—1905 to 1911, Girish Chandra produced ten of his best dramas—social, historical and religious, which again raised Minerva to a position of greater fame and prosperity.

The first piece that Girish wrote for the Minerva now was a short mythological opera called "Hara Gouri", versification whereof was very simple and sweet. It showed how Mahadev first gave lessons about agriculture and how the divine consort put on Sankha as a

mark of wife-hood. The plot was taken from Rameswar's *Sivayana.*

The part of Siva was acted by Tarok Palit on the opening night, 4th March, 1905 and Gouri by Tarasundari. Palit, however, failed to represent the part properly. Girish then himself appeared in the role. The atmosphere of Theatre was still restless and Girish had to restore it to its proper position. He then appeared as Harish in "Haranidhi" with Tara Sundari as Kadambini.

After this, Girish contributed a great master-piece to the Bengali Stage from Minerva —in the drama of "Balidan". It depicts in vivid colours the harrowing evils that result from the present dowry-system in marriage that prevails among the Bengali Hindus, specially the middle class gentlemen who are its worstvictims. Under this compulsory dowry system, the miseries of a father who has more than one marriagable daughter, knew no,bounds. But the climax of the tragedy is that even on payment of a ruinous price, a desirable bride - groom is seldom to be found. It is the rich that capture the best boys by offering fancy prices for them and tho parents of the boys sell their sons to the highest bidder.

Girish exposes this highly scandalous practice of the practical sale of the boys in matrimonial market that has produced the gravest evil in Hindu society in comparison with which all other evils will appear to be quite insignificant. It reduces the girl's parents to destitution and poverty, the girl curses herself for her birth, and there are instances in which to save their parents from distress and social obloquy for having un-married, grown-up daughters, they have committed suicide.* With a firm grasp of facts Girish has given the most graphic picture of this monstrous practice that is eating into the vitals of the Bengali Hindus.

"Balidan" is great both as social drama and as a pure tragedy. It is one of the greatest tragedies in the world's literature. It is masterly in its construction, in its evolution of events, in the delineation of characters and in all that contributes to the highest perfection of dramatic art. From beginning to end, the drama is tense with tragic emotion and of burning social interest.

"Balidan" is literally animal sacrifice before a Hindu deity. The drama of its name has demonstrated how an honest house-holder of

* Snehalata's suicide in 1913 is an instance in point.

moderate means is sacrificed to the Moloch of the dowry system in marriage. But the word also means self-sacrifice which has been exemplified in the annihilation of selfish interests by Dulal and desires by Jobi.

Girish himself used to appear in the role of Karunamaya, the unfortunate father of marriageable daughers. His rendering of the part was so masterly that even the most gifted actors dared not appear in that role after him. It was simply superb. There was no ranting, no theatrical pose, no affectation anywhere, but simply by the changes of expressions and by the modulations of voice, Girish imparted the most vivid impressions of different complex emtions—such as of indignation, grief, despair, despondency, surprise, disgust and frenzy as well as love, affection, and joy. Mr.D.L.Roy, the famous Bengali Wit as also a peet and dramatist, exclaimed in deep admiration—"I have seen Sir Henry Irving play a hero of this kind, but Girish is infinitely superior to him." Such was also the opinion of all who had seen both Irving and Girish.

Tara Sundari as Korunamoy's wife Saresswati did her part admirably. So was Ardhendu Sekhar's Rupchand masterly. But Girish's son, Dani Babu cast even the best

eomic actar into shade in the representation of Dulal, Rupchenn's spoilt-child. Dulal's part is the most difficult, few can comprehend the real spirit but Dani Babu was extraordinarily superb in this role. Both Ramanath and Mohit two villains were highly successful—Mohit's exclamation "Damn it" came to be a favourite expression with the young. His last scene of repentence was very touching. Sudhira Bala's Matangini and Jivon Pal's Kali Ghatak were good, but Sushila's Jobi was astonishingly charming and her songs extra-ordinarily soul-stirring.

The parts were distributed as follows :—

Karunamoy Bose	...	Girish Chandra
Nalini the son	...	Dhirendra Nath (apprentice)
Saraswati (his wife)	...	Tara Sundari.
Kiron moye (first daughter)	...	Kiron Bala.
Hiron moye (second daughter)		Charu Bala.
Jatirmoye (third daughter)	...	Monorama.
Ghanashyam Ghose (a wealthy citizen)	...	Montu Babu. (Monindra Mondal).
Rajluxmi (his wife)	...	Nagendra Bala
Kishore, his son, (Roychand and Premchand Scholar—founder of the Bandhab Samiti)	...	Aparesh Chandra

Bhabini (his daughter)	...	Panna Sundary.
Ramlal (his son-in-law)	...	Nutbehari.
Rupchand Mitter (a man of wealth but of crooked nature)	...	Ardhendu Mustafi.
Dulal Chand (his son an idiot, hunch-backed and spoilt child, most eager to marry Karunamoye's daughters)		Dani Babu.
Jasomati (Rupchand's wife)	...	Sorojini.
Kali Ghatak (match-maker)	...	Jibonkristo Paul.
Ramanath (a villain but a distant cousin of Matangini)	...	Monmatha Nath Paul (Handu Babu).
Jobi (his wife but whom he did not recognise)	...	Sushila Bala.
Matangini (widowed mother of Mohit)	...	Sudhira Bala (Patal).
Mohit (who failed thrice in F. A. examination and afterwards became the first son-in-law of Karunamoye)	...	Khetro Mohen Mitra.
Mukunda (aged about fifty, who married Hironmoye after he became widower	...	Atool Ganguly.
Miriganka (the son)	...	Brojendra.

Maid servant	...	Chapala Sundari.
Ukil	...	Jnan Kali Babu.
Inspector	...	Nagendra Ghosh.

The performance continued each Saturday and on the 5th night of the performance, Hon'ble Sir Chandra Madhab Ghose, Kt, the then Offg : Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court, Justice Sir Gurudas Banerjee Kt., Mr. Justice Saroda Charan Mitra, Hon'ble Bhupendra Nath Bose, Rai Jatindra Nath Choudhury, Kumar Manmatha Nath Mitter and many other leading members of the Bengali community came to witness the performance. From start to finish they were all admiration for Girish, both for the drama as also for his masterly representation of the hero's part.*

Mr. Justice Saroda Charan Mitter, who had once asked Girish to write a drama about the ruinous Dowry system in marriage of which

* Thus says Mr. N. N. Ghose, Principal Metropolitan College—

"......The play is an intensely realistic tragedy...Babu Girish Chandra Ghose, the talented author of the play, played the part of Karunamoy to perfection. Most of the actors and actresses are upto the mark. &c...."

Indian Nation, Aug. 14, 1905

the middle class Hindus are the worst victims, thought that this powerful tragedy would succeed in abolishing the scandalous practice of extorting money and other things from the bride's parents.

Babu Amrita Lall Bose, the famous dramatist and Manager of the Star Theatre expressed his unreserved admiration for the drama. He said that since the performance of the "Nildurpan" he had not witnessed such a powerful and moving tragedy like "Balidan". It inspired Mr : D. L. Roy, the famous dramatist of Bengal to write social dramas, which resulted later in the production of "Paraparey" and "Banga Nari".

After some nights, Girish Chandra fell ill and the part was given to Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi. A great and veteran actor as he was, he at first refused to appear as Karunamoy because he felt diffident to represent the character as had been done by Girish, with such consummate histrionic skill ; yet it must be admitted that though Ardhendu Sekhar was not so masterly in the part like Girish, still he was the next best. After him, on different occasions and on the boards of different theatres, eminent actors like Amrita Lall Bose, Dani Babu, Amarendra

Nath Dutt, Chuni Lall Deb often appeared in the role but none could approach Girish in the inimitable representation of the part. Some of the persent-day actors including even Mr. Sisir Kumar Bhadury also tried the part, but without much success. If the modern actors could represent the true tragic vein of Karunamoy's character in its proper light, "Balidan" would have been repeated on the stage even to the present day, to the great good and enjoyment of the audience.

No doubt Balidan was written with a special purpose, but that does not take away anything from its intrinsic worth as a drama. The misleading shibboleth—'Art for art's sake', has long been exploded by Ibsen, Bernerd Shaw and others. Indeed no work of art can be absolutely purposeless. The purpose underlying a great work of art may lose its importance or interest in the course of time, but not the work of art. We do not any more believe in the legend of Prometheus or of Faust but neither the "Prometheus Unbound" of Shelly nor the Faust of Goethe or Marlow has lost a bit of its dramatic interest. Time may come when Bengal may solve the burning problem of a daughter's marriage, but Balidan as a work of art and a

high-class tragedy will not least suffer for it. No longer we believe in King Lear's legendary division of the kingdom between his daughters, but 'Lear' remains as of supreme work of art; likewise Balidan will always find a place among the highest tragedies of the world.

We are, however, glad to observe that very recently a number of performances of the above tragedy "Balidan" was arranged by Girish Parishod on the Board of Minerva Theatre during the Girish centenary through the courtesy of Mr. N. C. Gupta, a patron of stage and a gentleman of great culture and it has been the unanimous verdict of the audience, having each occasion packed the theatre to its utmost capacity, that even though the occasion of "Balidan" no longer exists, nor was it acted by persons like Girish Chandra and his colleagues, then in the meridian of their glory, representation of the difficult characters Korunamoy, Saraswati, Dulal, Mohit, Kiron, Jobi, Kisore, Jhee, Ghonsyam etc. exhibiting complex and difficult emotions were made by artists of merit who felt most and acted as if they were in actual life. Indeed it is the excellence in histrionic talents that is necessary for the representation of the great dramas of Girish, which, however, is sadly lacking in the

most of the present-day actors. We congratulate the Girish Parishod * and its organisers Messrs. Kiron Chandra Dutt, Kshitish Chakravorty, Asoke Sastri, and Kshetra Mitra (director) on having secured such a distinguished corps of amateurs with whom joined a few artists of repute of the different stages and we further wish that they would continue in their en-

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* In the last performance on 6th March 1944, (the former being on 13th December, 1943 and 11th February, 1944) the following artists appeared in different roles :—

Korunamoy—Bengal's VonSchlegel, Ghonosyam—Mr. Bankim Bhattacharjee M.A. B.L., Mohit—Ksetro Mohan Mitter, Kisore—Rai Saheb Monomohan Ghosh, Ramanath — Bhutnath Mukherjee, Ramlal — Ratin Banerjee, Ukil—Mr. Birendra Ghosh B. L., Bailiff—Mr. Dhirendra Mukherjee B.L., Saraswati—Susila Sundari of Naharin fame, Jobi—Ascharjamoyee (famous songstress), Kiron—Sefalika (Putul), Jhee—Ranibala, a modern actress of great merit, Matangini —Giribala, Hiron—Sarala (Benki).

A. B. Patrika 6-3-44.

N. B.—Augustus William Von Schlegel (born Sept. 5, 1767—d. May 12, 1845) was the distinguished German critic on drama and stage. His "Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature" is an authoritative book referred to often times by the preseut author. His eulogy of Shakespeare and dispargement of Moliere has been clear in his essays.

deavours to resuscitate the soul-stirring and masterly dramas of Girish Chandra Ghose.

Now to come to Minerva, Balidan drove away the last trace of the cheap period of presents (*upahar*) and earned once more a great reputation for the Minerva Theatre. It was the beginning of the succession of the great and powerful dramas that began to pour now on the Minerva Stage and raised it to a pinnacle of success.

Girish Chandra next commenced another drama *Rana Pratap* and completed about two Acts. But when the news reached him that the Star theatrical company put a drama of the same name under active rehearsals, he stopped there and began to compose a drama about the political history of Bengal during middle of the eighteenth century.

On the 22nd of July, 1905, the Star Theatre began to show the performance of Rana Protap—the hero of Rajasthan—a drama by Mr. D. L. Roy. The heroic achievements and the great self-sacrifice of this immortal Rajput patriot at once appealed to the sentiments of the educated people even before the rise of the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal. The sensation was so great that on the first night

400 people returned disappointed, for want of accommodation. But what offended Mr. Roy was that the well-known poem of Girish Chandra known as "Haldighater Judha"—was incorporated in its performance—four attendants reciting, the poem and giving a description of the battle. Mr. Roy considered this to be an insult and sought the help of the Minerva through Babu Mohendra Kumar Mitra. Some printed copies were given and the Minerva got ready for the performance for 5 days and the play began to be shown on the boards of Minerva from 2nd night (29th July) after it had opened at Star. The following cast in Minerva and Star will enable our readers to judge the nature of the tough competition :—

Characters	Minerva	Star
Rana Protap	Dani Babu	Amritalall Mitter
Saktasing	Aparesh Mukherjee	Amrita Bose
Prithwiraj	Ardhendu Mustafi	Kashinath Chatterjee
Mansingh	Monindra Mondal	Akshoy Kali Koer
Akbar	Narendra Banerjee	Hiralall Dutt
Selim	Khetro Mitter	Sarat Mitra
Purohit	Handu Babu	
Joshi Bai	Tara Sundari	Sarajubala
Meher	Susilabala	Nari Sundari
Doulat	Tarasundari	Basanta Kumari
Ira	Bhusan Kumari (jr)	Angurbala
Laksmi	Sudhirabala (Patal)	

On the first night Tara Sundari played in both the roles of Joshi and Doulat though at the last moment the latter part was assigned to her on account of the illness of the actress chosen for it. Yet she acted the part most-successfully.

For three nights of Rana Protap's performance Girish Chandra himself recited his poem "Haldighater Judha" before the curtain was raised. For some nights the audience was large but the performance could not, in the long run, stand competition with that of the Star where the audience remained pouring as usual, but in Minerva the sales dwindled to about Rs. 400/-. Dani Babu could not compete with his guru Amritalal while the combination at Star was a splendid one. The only part that was superior to that of the Star was Sushila's Meherunnissa at the Minerva, and Mr. D.L. Roy was simply charmed by her performance.

About this time, Mr. Shelly Bonerjee—the receiver decided to have the theatre-house sold on auction. Messrs. Pandey and Mitra hesitated to offer so large a sum, as sales were not still satisfactory. But Girish predicted that his new dramas would bring immense money and insisted on the purchase. Pandey offered

Rs. 60,000/- and acquired the right of ownership. Girish's prediction proved to be true, as "Serajuddula" alone fetched about a lac of rupees within a year.

"Serajuddoula", as the next piece was called, deals with the life and the history of last independent Nawab of Bengal. It deals with the tragic fate of the unfortunate prince, his constant efforts to bring home to the mind of his counsellors the imminent perils to which his throne was exposed, his noble and patriotic exhortations to his wily and intriguing officers, his deep affection for the people of Bengal,—which moved even the most hard-hearted spectators to tears. The representation of the drama was so masterly that every one was grieved to see that a prince so high-minded and noble and endowed with all the princely qualities could not succeed in saving his throne and his life from vile conspiracy hatched by his treacherous, selfish and unscrupulous courtiers. It is a high-class drama and the "Bengali" * rightly observes—"It requires no mean talent to interpret the diverse and complex characters that the gifted author marshalled in it. It is *nonpareil*."

It was first staged on Sept. 7, 1905, just

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* "Bengalee", 3rd Feb. 1906.

before the official order partitioning Bengal was passed on Oct. 16, 1905, and a month after the Swadeshi Movement had been inaugurated on Aug, 8, the same year,

The cast was as follows :—

Seraj—Dani Babu, Mohonlal—Palit, Mirmadan—Montu Babu, Karim Chacha — Girish Chandra, Dansha Fakir—Mustafi, Mirzafar—Nilmadhob Chakraborty, Jagatseth—Nagendra Nath Ghose, Showkatjang and Mushala—Handu Babu, Col : Clive—Khetro Mohan Mitter, Holwel—Atal De, Omichand—Haridas Dutta, Rayballav—Jnan Kali Babu, Jahara—Tara Sundari, Begum—Susilabala, Aliberdi Begam—Hemanta Kumari, Ghaseti Begum — Sudhirabala (Patal), Mrs. Watts—Sudhirabala (Patal), Unmat jahara—Subashini (Malina), Amina Begum—Bhuson.

Dani Babu was the central figure in the play and appeared as if Sarajuddoula personified. Sushila spoke and sang like a Begum, Tara Sundari represented Jahara like a tragic queen —more powerful than Shakespeare's queen Margaret (Richard III). Indeed this part raised her position more than her famous Rezia. Sudhirabala's Mrs. Watts was very life-like, specially in the burial scene of the Nawab. Girish Chandra's Karim and Ardhendu Sekhar's Dansha were the chief attractions of the stage and Girish by his serio-comic acting as the Karim drew forth tears

from eyes of the whole audience, and the words quite different from Karunamay's were uttered as if they actually happened. For such highly difficult part of Karim Chacha too, Girish had no equal. Nilmadhob Babu and Montu Babu were true to life. Palit as Mohonlal represented the hero of Bengal properly and in the last scene when he rebuked "Mirjafar" for his treachery, he used to touch the hearts of all. Then again when Kshetro Babu as Clive used to address him—

"Mohan Lall, you are a hero. I have no power to let you off chains, but I must cordially express (Mukta Kanthe) you are a brave soldier. You have truly said, death will not affect your honour. Really you are a patriot," the effect was equally great. Statesman remarked thus * about the performance.

"The company at this theatre has been playing Seraj-ud-Dowlah, by G. C. Ghose, for the past five months with unabated success. The author himself takes the part of Karim Chacha, Clive is represented by Mr. K. Mitter, and the remaining characters are well-placed—"

The last words of Karim Chacha were so candid, pathetic and moving that when Mirzafar accosted him and said "Come, you will be put

* 17th February 1906—Statesman.

to death (Shule Dibo) for your treachery (Beimani)".

Karim thus said in reply "Beimani ? I am but a crane amongst the swans. Were there any punishment for treachery, the heads of the courtiers would have moved against each other !" Karim Chacha's leave-taking with a bow "Saheb, Bara Jabar lok Tumi, Bangla ki, Samasta Bharatbarsha Tomader"—How wonderful you are—what to speak of Bengal, the whole of India belongs to you"—and Clive's thanks—both reminded us of a prophesy and victor's glee. It appeared as if every thing was real.

Mr. Mustafi's expression as Drake—"Pearing lost" reminds us of the Governor of Bengal. In short the acting was the best that was ever represented on the Bengali Stage.

As to the characters of the drama, Jahara and Karim are two wonderful creations. Jahara personifies the malignant spirit of revenge, no doubt, but after revenge was satisfied, she is turned into a saintly woman because she was not actuated by any consideration of self. That distinguished her from Rai-durlov and others and such a complex character as of Jahar's is beyond comprehension. Karim Chacha again is the acute interpreter of contemporary men and events.

"Sirajaddoula" went on drawing each night crowds to its fullest capacity till "Mirkasim", another powerful drama of Girish Chandra was put on the boards of the Minerva on the 16th June 1906. This drama was also quite suitable for the time and was appreciated by the public. The events that led to the accession of Mirkasim to the throne of Bengal constitute an eventful period in the history of Bengal and Girish spared no pains to give a graphically vivid picture of them.

"Jagaron" by Babu Haranath Bose staged on 17th Dec. 1905 was not a success. So did Girish's "Basar" not produce much interest although Dani Babu was superb as Jagannath * and the cast included so noted artists as Ardhendu Sekhar, Susila and Palit.

"Durgesh Nandini" again was a great success with a very powerful cast—(Feb. 15, 1906)

Birendra Singh	...	Girish Chandra.
Vidya Diggaj	...	Ardhendu Sekhar Mustaffi.
Osman	...	Dani Babu.
Ayesha	...	Tara Sundari.
Bemola	...	Tincourie.
Jagatsingh	...	Mr. Palit.

* Jagannath was quite a different conception from Dulal. Girish's remark "he is an actor who plays the fool best" applied to Dani Babu conspicuously.

The combination of Dani Babu as Osman and Tara Sundari as Ayesha, not to speak of others, was a treat and one is reminded of a well known writer's observations which apply fittingly to them—

"This famous pair, brother and sister will probably always be remembered as of a "great style" of acting that had both in declamation and gesture the merit of a fine technique".

Till the last day, their appearnce in the above two roles was a sight to see, so masterly was their movements and postures.

In June 1906, Lokomanya Tilak accompanied by Mr. Khaparade paid a visit to the Theatre and both were charmed with the representation of Serajuddoula. Grish was then on the stage in the role of Karim Chacha. He paid high encomiums to them, not forgetting to mention about the Bargi plunders which weakened Bengal very much, giving only a handle to the western traders.

"Mirkasim" was staged on the 16th June 1906 and the cast was as follows :—

Mirkashim—Dani Babu, Mirzafar—Girish Chandra, Vansitart—Atal Kar, Batson, Elis, Major Monro—Khetro Mitra, Shah Alam and Amiat—Thako Babu, Ali Ibrahim—Palit, Taki Khan—Nagendra Ghose, Sujauddoulla and Lal Singh—Montu Babu, Samsher

and Doctor Fuller—Handu Babu, Tara—Tincowri, Mani Begum—Sudhira Bala, Begum—Susilabala, Hastings—Prokasa Moni, Shamaroo—Hari Bhusan Bhatt, Haibat and Arab Ali—Jivan Krishna Paul, Mahmmad Amid—Upendra Basak, Holwell, Hay and Major Adams—Ardhendu Babu, Khoja Pidru—Hari Das Dutta, Gurgan—Khagendra Sarkar, John Karnach—Satyendra Dey, Nanda Kumar—Satcowri Gangulee, Khoza Bajid and Zafar—Nirmal Ch. Gangulee.

Mirkasim was very well rendered by Dani Babu. His expressions and delivery both were masterly. Praksh Moni too as Hastings deserves much mention.

Miss Tincowri's impressive appearance gave her once more a great advantage on the stage and she very successfully represented the character of Tara. Girish as Mirzafar vividly represented the treacherous Nabab and the last scene of repentance with marks of leprosy on his person was specially touching. He did not forget to sign the 'Treaty' before council members from the right side to the left as Persian Charactes are written. Babu Nil Madhob Chakravorty was his under-study.

About the success of the performance we quote here the observations of the "Bengalee" of Sir Surendra Nath.

"Babu Girish Chandra Ghose's new historical drama, 'Mirkasem', which was put on the boards of the Minerva Theatre for the first time on Saturday last, has been a phenomenal success, both from the histrionic and literary points of view. The tumultuous period that followed the accession of Mir Kasem to the throne, the strenuous fight that the ruler had with the East India Company for the protection of the indigenous industries and the various stratagems resorted to by both sides to win their points, have, with remarkable fidelity and consummate art, been portrayed by Bengal's greatest play-wright. The piece abounds with diverse and complex characters, all of them very skilfully marshalled to produce an excellent stage-effect, which one must see to fully realise it etc."

Bengalee 23rd June, 1906.

Both the above dramas not only fetched fabulous sums of money, but contributed considerably to the growth of the national movement of Bengal. They changed the mentality of the people who for the first time saw before our eyes "What history of Bengal is and how uptil now we had simply committed to memory incorrect things that have been put to our mouths as to parrots."

Mirkasem was followed by Atul Krishna Mitter's "Shiree Farhad" on the 8th Sept. and D. L. Roy's "Durgadas"* on the 8th Dec. 1906. Durgadas also matched the other national pieces well and Minerva's reputation continued on. The drama related to the thrilling and sensational Rajput war of the 17th century in which Durgadas and Raj Singh fought valiantly against Emperor Aurangzeb.

Excessive labour at the Minerva and old age seriously told upon Girish's health and on the approach of the winter he contracted asthmatic fits. Some time in November the proprietors came to see him at his house but regretted that they would not be able to stage

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* Durgadas—Dani Babu, Samardas—Thako Babu, Dilirkhan—Mr. Palit, Aurangzeb—Preonath Ghose, Tahebar Kha—Handu Babu, Sundar Das—Mantu Babu, Sham Singh—Hari Das Datta, Shambhuji—Nripendra Bose, Akbar—Khetro Babu, Rajsingha—Nilmadhab Chakraberty, Rajsing's sons—Bhim Singh—Nagen Ghose, Joyshingh—Satyen De, Kasim—Angus, Gulanair—Sudhira Bala, Mahamaya—Prokash Moni, Razia—Susila Bala, Kamala—Hemanta Kumari, Saraswati—Nagendra Bala.

N.B.—The same drama was also staged on the same day in the "National" which was being managed by Babu Chuni Lal Deb.

any new skit during the X'mas. He consoled them and wrote a new operatta *Jaisa Ke Taisa* borrowing the theme from Moliere's L' Amour Medicin—or Rightly Served. Ardhendu Babu was in the role of Haradhan (Karta) but from the second night, Dani Babu appeared in the role of Karta. He was appreciated more than Mr. Mustafi in this part, and the piece became very enjoyable from that time.

It opened on the New year's day of 1907 and was a highly amusing entertainment. Next it was added to Durgadas, which had a run for months. The highly gifted actress Susilabala in her little but pleasant role of Garab displayed histrionic talents of a very high order. In a hearty laugh she used to exhibit all the five vowels (a, e, i, o & u) in so artistic a way that the dramatist himself was greatly amazed to see so great an improvement upon himself.

Girish's illness continued long and for several months we do not find the great figure any more on the stage. After a continued absence from illness, Girish appeared on the 9th of June 1907 in his inimitable role of Jogesh in "Profulla".

In his absence the opera "Lulia" had a run for 15 nights.

Girish then began to compose a drama by the name of "Mohomed Shah" in whose reign Nadir Shah invaded India. But finding some similarity with Serajuddula in some places, he stopped it. He then began to compose a drama "Chhatrapati Sivaji", The Sivaji festivals throughout India at the time, presence of Tilak in Calcutta and the stirring period seem to be the origin of the drama. It was finished by May and was then put under active rehearsals. It was staged at Minerva on the 17th August 1907 but Girish was not then here during performance. A new set of artists had already come in the person of Amarendra Nath Dutt and Sm. Kusum Kumari and Girish Chandra left the Minerva for the Kohinoor Theatre and was there for about a year. The history of his activities for one year will be narrated in connection of the Kohinoor Theatre, but let us in the meantime see what took place at the Minerva.

Amarendra Nath was appointed at first as the assistant Manager but on Girish's departure was made the Manager. Girish had selected the parts for Chhatrapati and coached them as long as he was at the Minerva.

"Chhatrapati" was very successful at the Minerva and Amarendra Nath with his hand-

some and tall stature and the suitable make-up made an excellent representation of Sivaji. Other parts, too, were well done. The part of Putla Bai—a novel creation of a devoted wife—was masterly represented by Sushila and the cast was as follows :—

Ramdas Swami—Nagendra Ghose, Aurangzeb—Tarok Das Palit, Tanaji—Preonath Ghose, Afzal—N. Banerjee, Shaesta Khan—Akshoy Kumar Chakroborty, Gongaji — Nripendra Bose, Lakshmibai — Sudhirabala, Jeejabai—Prokasmoni, Saibai—Kusum Kumari, Dilir Khan—Ahindra De, Putlabai—Sushilabala, Sambhuji (young)—Sasimukhi.

At Kohinoor Theatre also Girish Chandra had "Chhatrapati" staged from the 15th September (28th Bhadra) with the following cast :—

Sivaji—Dani Babu, Aurongazeb—Girish Chandra (himself), Ramdas Swami—Montu Babu, Tanaji—Kartic Babu, Dadajo Konda—Nilmadhab Babu, Dilir Khan and Morapant—Khetro Babu, Shambhuji—Ferojabala (Neni), Gongaji—Handu Babu, Lakshmi bai—Tarasundari, Jeejabai—Tincowrie, Saibai—Kironshashi, Putlabai—Kironbala.

Girish's "Chhatrapati" in both the theatres—Minerva and Kohinoor—was a great sensation and it will not be out of place to give a comparative idea of the performances held simultaneously at both the theatre. Kohinoor's Aurongzeb was without a parallel, but Palit too

was not unsatisfactory. Jejee Bai and Laksmibai represented by Tincowri and Tarasundari were far superior to Prokasmoni and Sudhirabala whose representations, too, were not bad. Kohinoor's Gongaji was marvellous, but Nripen Bose at Minerva, though always a comic actor, was also true to life in his part. Ramdas Swami of Minerva was tolerable, but Montu Babu suited the part much more.

Dani Babu infused real spirit to his part and acted very well, but Minerva's Sivaji suited the part more and everything taken together, the impartial vote would be in favour of Mr. Dutt. Tanaji of Minerva was better and Saibai and Putlabai of Kohinoor inspite of their charming appearances were no match for those of Minerva, but the performance on the whole was better at Kohinoor, though sales at Minerva were not less satisfactory than those at Kohinoor.

Local papers too were eulogistic about the performance of "Chhatra Pati" which according to the opinion of late Sir Surendra Nath Banerjee, editor, Bengalee was "one of the best, and most powerful dramas ever produced on the Indian Stage" and Pandit Shakharam Ganesh Deoshkar, the worthy Marhatta

Brahmin then editing our Bengali weekly "Hitabadi" wrote thus in his paper :—

"We hoped very much when we heard a genius and erudite scholar of Girish Chandra's type was writing a drama on "Chattrapati." We are now too much pleased with the book itself as written and staged under his supervision. His mission has been successful, We can say without any hesitation that Girish Chandra has been fully successful in depicting with great dexterity the rise and progress of the Marhatta people, and there has been no least deviation from the estimate the Marhatta people as a whole entertain about the national hero and leader. The character of Sivaji as also the acts of his comrades have been fully described by Girish Chandra."

The "Bangabashi" too very rightly said of Girish :—

"Your compeer is your ownself"

The Statesman of 17th Nov. 1907 wrote of Minerva performance thus :—

"The popularity of Babu Girish Chandra Ghose's powerful drama Chhatrapati which deals with some of the most striking incidents

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* Hitabadi 17th Aswin 1914.

in the life of Sivaji, is manifest from the large audiences which are attracted to the Minerva Theatre on every occasion that this thrilling play is billed. Though it has been running for about ten weeks now, the large auditorium was crammed in every part and early in evening the sale of tickets had to be stopped, the large overflow helping to fill the adjacent play-houses."

National Dramas

Thus we find that the period between 1900—1907 was a period of National awakening and Girish's contributions to the movement were not less important and valuable than that of any leader of the time. The great Bankim was no more, but Girish as a worthy successor took up the movement from the stage and began to electrify the people with patriotic inspirations therefrom. We have spoken of "*Chanda*" how the national hero should subordinate all his self to the cause. That was in 1890.

Then the ideals of boy-hero and mother-hood were given in the drama "Jana" in 1894

In 1897, came out "Mayabashan" where Girish satired the congress of the time but gave a programme of nation's construction and

advocated religious unity amongst all classes of people.

The old Century passed and the new came and at that auspicious hour he put up the National hero—Bankim's Sitaram, with his heroism, his resolve to save the life of a dependant even at the cost of his life and a programme of unity between Hindus and Mohomedans,

In 1902, Girish gave the ideal of another hero in the character of Rangalal in "Bhranti" whose mission of life was not political but national—in rendering service to mankind, a hero who loved his country and race and overcame the fear of 'Death'. This was followed by his "Satnam" producing an ideal heroine and a Fakirram and Charandas to whom death for the country was preferable to death in Beneras or on the Ganges. This drama, too, was a truly nationalistic one.

"Sitaram" inspired Kshirode Prosad to write a drama on another national hero "Protapaditya" and it too produced a great sensation in the country. Then came more vigorous plays which really began to awaken genuine spirit of love and sacrifice for the country and the first of these dramas was "Serajaddoula" followed again by "Mirkasem". "Padmini", "Palashir Prayes-

chitta," "Nando Kumar," followed in the Star, and last came "Chhatrapati" staged both from Minerva and Kohinoor. The same ideas were also instilled through Harisadhon Mukerjee's "Banga Vikram" and Mr. D. L. Roy's Rana Protap, Durgadas and Mewar Patan. The period may thus be remembered as the 'National period of the Stage'.

Our country remembers that to the great national sorrow, Bengal was partitioned in 1905 and the agitation inaugurated, and the Swadeshi Movement started stirred the whole country from one end to the other. Meetings and processions help in propaganda to a certain extent only, but can not continue for long and unless there is a solid back-ground, no movement can last. The above movements too would have proved short-lived, were not the aforesaid dramas produced at that time. At such time of the greatest need, these dramas acted like a great inspiration, and changed the servile mentality of the people. In fact at the time of the Swadeshi Movement what hundred lectures could not do, was accomplished by one single performance of Serajuddoula or Mirkasem. But it is a pity that Goverment has caused irreparable loss to dramatic literature by proscribing the above dramas including Chhatrapati.

To come to the Stage, after a few nights of the performance of Chhatrapati, Sushila made an agreement with Sarat Roy, proprietor Kohinoor, to work there. Mr. Pandey applied to the High Court for an order of injunction. On Feb. 12, 1908, Mr. Justice Fletcher enjoined her from working elsewhere during the three years' agreement with Pandey. She however sat idle, Sarat Babu helping her with a monthly allowance. She did not join Minerva till Girish came there and produced "Sasti Ki Santi." The only other new piece staged during the period was "Dalita Phanini" (A. N. Dutt) staged on Nov. 30, 1907, after which both Amarendra and Kusum left for the Star.

After the death of Mr. Sarat Roy, proprietor Kohinoor Theatre, there was a rupture between Sarat Babu's brother Sisir Roy and Girish, and the latter left. Efforts were made by both Minerva and Star to take him in, but Minerva was able to secure Girish's services. He came here in July 1908.

At Minerva he began to compose a social drama "Shasti Ki Santi—Is this peace or punishment ?" based on the problem of Hindu widows. It was at this time two famous widow-marriages were solemnised, one that of the

daughter of Rai Bahadoor Debendra Chandra Ghosh—Govt. Pleader, Alipore (father of late Mr. Justice Charu Chandra Ghosh) and the other that of the daughter of Sir Ashutosh Mookherjee, then a Judge of the High Court, in which case an application for injunction was also made by the mother of the deceased husband.

The Drama, however is not directed against widow-remarriage but has rather discussed all phases of the questions involving such reforms.

It has also sought to find out proper occupations for widows whose marriages were not possible and lives of Pagal (Sadasheeb Rao in cognito) and Haromani (his wife) have been dedicated to the service of the hopeless and helpless. Brahmacharya for widows has also been advocated. The drama from the opening night on 7-11-08 was acted very artistically and the cast was as followes :—

Prosanna Kumar—Dani Babu, Pagal—N. Banerjee (amateur), Prokas—T. Palit, Beni and Mr. Basu—Preonath Ghose, Syamadas—Satish Chandra Benerjee, Ghenchi—Satyendra Nath De, Sarveshwar—Nagendra Nath Ghosh, Heboo (stammerer)—Hiralall Chaterjee, Butto Krishna—Haridas Dutta, Magistrate—Haribhusan Babu, Ganatkar (Shubhankar)—Akshoy Chakravorty, Parbati—Prokeshmoni, Nirmala—

Hemanta Kumari, Bhubon Mohini—Sorojini (Neri), Promada—Sashimuhki, Chitteswari—C h a p a l a, Haromoni—Sushila Bala.

The most successful part was that of Prasanna Kumar whose rendering of the tragic and serious part left nothing to be desired for. Emotional sentiments and arguments in favour of widow remarriage, his loss of balance at the sight of his widowed daughter on the day of Ekadashi (11th of new or full-moon) and his feeling of insult heaped on him by the boys and men of his society after the mishap that happened with his widowed daughter Bhubonmohini, the frenzied state when he caused the death of his elder daughter and the compassion he immediately felt for her, were shown with a masterly finish. This was the first time that Dani Babu appeared as a hero in a social tragedy and the exta-ordinary exposition of his talents showed that he was the man who would in future rule the Bengali stage, and that happened when he appeared as Upen, Durga Sankar and Shyama subsequently. The simple but humorous expressions of the idiotic Heboo were very interesting and both Pagal and Haramoni were natural to a degree. The play though a grim tragedy caters however to all kinds of tastes and

embodies in it like many tragedies of Shakespeare, situations both humorous and intensely pathetic.

The reputation of the drama spread far wide, and the bulk of the audience consisted of graduates and undergraduates.

Sasti Ki Santi was succeeded by Mr. D. L. Roy's historical drama "Mewar Patan" which chronicles the glorious career of Amar Singh, the worthy son of the great Rana Protap. It was staged on 26th Dec. 1908. The drama was a great success and its patriotic songs were highly captivating. The cast was distributed as follows :—

Amar Singh—Dani Babu, Govinda Singh—Mr. Palit, Sagar Singh—Haribhuson Bhattacharya, Aroon Singh—Satyen De, Satyabati—Prakashmoni, Manashi—Susila, Queen—Sorojini.

Dambaz and Sahjadi two Operas of Atul Mitra intervened Mewar Patan and Shajahan —another powerful and interesting drama of Mr. D. L. Roy which was staged on 29th Aug. 1909.

Shajahan is an oft-staged piece and patriotic sentiments, masterly delineation, fine dramatic touches and its sweet rapturous songs have even to day made the drama a unique success. The patriotic song—the best of the countries is my native land—"Amar Janma-

bhumi" like the poet's famous national song *Banga Amar Janani Amar, Dhatri Amar, Amar Desh* will never be forgotten. Of all the characters the part of Peari Banu, Shuja's Begum, was the most entertaining. Her witticism, sweet songs and racy talks kept the whole audience spell-bound with admiration and delight.

Shajahan speaks of a period of Indian history, described before this, in "Madhavi Kankan"—a novel of Mr. R. C. Dutt, how during the mental and physical strain of the old Emperor Shajahan, Aurangzeb, the third son of the Emperor hastened from Deccan to Delhi and by treachery and fratricidal war, removed all obstacles from his path to the throne which he himself ascended at the end, by putting his brothers to death and flight. Dani Babu did full justice to the part of Aurangzeb. The Court scene in act II in which he was successful in pacifying the discontented chiefs was simply superb.

The author, Mr. D. L. Roy has taken certain hints from Shakespeare's King Lear and tried to draw a parallel between the condition of the Emperor and that of King Lear. *

* "Ingratitude thou marble-hearted fiend
More hideous, when thou showest thee in a child
Than the sea-monster !"
"How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child !—King Lear Act. 1 Scene 4

Babu Preo Nath Ghose fully justified his part in the title role and was supported in the cast by the following artists :—

Dara—Mr. Palit, Suja—Hiralal Babu, Dildar—Hari Bhusan Babu, Mahomod—Satyendra Babu, Soleman—Ahindra Dey, Dilirkhan—Mrityunjoy Pal, Jasobanta Sing—Nagendra Ghose, Jahanara—Sudhirabala, Mahamya—Prokasmoni, Peara—Susila, Nadira—Hemanta Kumari.

This play continued to have a good run till the X'mas skit Bhagirath based upon the funny tale of the world-renowned poet Rabindra Nath was presented to the audience.

Although Girish's health was failing and he suffered from Asthma now and again, he did not hesitate to appear in the role of Jogesh supported by Babu Radhamadhob Kar (Girish's earliest colleague) as Bhaja-hari, Haribhuson Babu as Ramesh, Dani Babu as Suresh, Preonath Babu as Sibnath, Tincowrie as Jnanada and Susila as Profulla.

Nor is this all. He gave another surprise to the public . The part of Chandra Sekhar had hitherto been taken by his famaus pupil Amrita Lall Mitter of the Star, but Girish in his old age and with broken health, showed to every body's astonishment and delight how superb the representation of

that part could be. Here too Girish by his supreme histrionic art cast even his gifted pupil into shade ! He appeared twice in this role on the 15th May and 16th June 1910 with Dani Babu as Protap, Mr. Radhamadhab Kar as Foster, Priyanath Ghose as Mirkasem, Akshoy Chakrabarty as Biswas and Susila as Dalani. Then again he gave a benefit performance on the 11th August in aid of the famous poet Rajani Kanta Sen who was then lying seriously ill at the Medical College Hospital

In the early part of Aug. 1910 Tarasundari again joined the Minerva, and with her as Shaibalini, Girish appeared in the role of Chandrasekhar on the13th August. Again on the 20th August, for the last time in his life he appeared as Pashupati in Mrinalini with Tarasundari as Monorama and Shusila as Girijaya. This was the part which years ago proved him to be a peerless artist, and would have adorned any artist of Europe with royal honour as Babu Amritalal Bose used to say. After this, with the approach of the ensuing winter, he again fell ill and had to leave for Benares:

Girish's Last Dramas

But although he grew old and his health was declining, his imaginations

and mental powers however saw no signs of decay. The last three dramas without any parallel in the Bengali Literature are living evidence of his intellectual vigour and dramatic genius. These not only show the poet's keen insight to the great truths revealed to the saints and philosophers of ancient India, but are enlivened with great interest for the present.

"Sankaracharya" was put on the boards on the 15th January 1910 and showed how abstruse teachings of Vedantism—Asti, Bhati and Pritie—Ahang Jnanam, could be made intelligible to the common people. Our readers know full well that Sankarcharya was the great Apostel of Hinduism who lived and flourished at one of the most critical periods of India history. When the Budhist Tantriks were degrading religion into immoral and brutal practices, Sankar preached the broad principles of Hinduism based upon Vedantism and freed it from all corruptions and degenerating influences. By his great intellectual genius and super-human moral force Sankaracharya scored victory after victory over all the sophists and Tantriks and made Hindu religion once more revered and respected throughout the length and breadth of Hindusthan. Indeed, the great fame of Sankaracharya will ever live enshrined

in the hearts of his co-religionists and in the minds of the students of Philosophy of all ages and of all countries. Girish Chandra had been engaged over this drama for a long-time and had done his best to introduce the religious teachings of the great Master in the way most acceptable to the people in general.

The play was witnessed by the cultured as well as by ordinary people and had a very good run. An instance, as how to a Vedantist a Chandal is no more untouchable than a person of other castes is seen in the following conversation, and it was written long before Mahatma Gandhi preached his cult of the removal of untouchability. Sankar enters the ghat of Monikarnika at Benares, when Mahadeb in the guise of a Chandal with Chandal—followers and four dogs signifying the four Vedas surrounded him and indulged in songs as if under the influence of intoxication, Sankara was much offended at this and addressing them said :—

"Ah, Chandal, what kind of behaviour is this! Why are you obstructing my way to bathe in the Ganges? Thou art untouchable. keep at a distance, and let me pass."

The Chandals did not move but looked amazed at the expressions of Sankara. Sankara

grew furious and asked them to depart, to which the Chandala gave the following reply :—

"You look like a Sannyasi, but you have no sense.

"The sun that shines in Ganges or is reflected on the intoxicants in the Handis is the same; —Hallo, this person has still vanity and does not know one, but knows only many—separate and distinct."

Sankara was roused to his senses ; he asked Mahadeba to forgive him and wanted him to appear before him in his true from.

The part of Sankara is the most important part in the whole book and Dani Babu succeeded in giving expressions to the various roles of the great reformer, as a philosopher, as a preacher, and as a commentator, and thus was successful in exhibiting the real spirit of the author. He was supported by the following persons in the cast :—

Mahadeb & Ugrabhairob—Satis Ch. Banerjee, Shishoo Sankar—Sarojini, Bishista—Hemanta Kumari, Mahamaya—Rajabala (next Susila), Madan Misra, Vyasa & Govindanath—Haribhuson Babu, Jagannath —Nripendra Ch. Bose, Sanonda—Satyen Dey, Santipada—Nagendra Babu, Ganapati — Hiralal Babu, Sheoli—Satkari Gangulee, Seoline—Tincowrie (Junior), Surama—Neerada, Bharati—Charushila.

This high-strung drama was succeeded, as a relief only by a historical drama of Kshirode Prashad—Banglar Mashnad—where the author delineated with masterly skill the historical incidents that led to the accession of Alivardi Khan to the throne of Bengal. It was staged with the following cast :

Sharfaraz—Dani Babu, Alivardy—Preonath Ghose, Nowajesh—Ahindra Dey, Maleka—Susila, Ghaseti—Charushila.

The play was staged on the 2nd of July 1910, and succeeded by two comic operas of Mr. Atul Krishna Mitra—"Pashane Prem" with Tarasundari as Santilata staged on the 3rd September and "Thike Bhool" staged on the 1st of October, after that we are introduced to another high class drama of rare merit—"Raja Asoke"—of Girish Chandra.

Every student of history knows that Raja Asoke was the most towering and remarkable figure amongst the Emperors of India, who had his capital at Pataliputra or Modern Patna and ruled over an empire extending from sea to sea and included within its limits such distant and powerful provinces as Afghanistan, Nepal, Punjab and Kashmere. The drama, written by Girish Chandra, is a true and correct account

of the glorious carreer of this great Emperor, often compared by European writers with Marcus Aurelius and Oliver Cromwell, and it reflects great credit on the Calcutta University that it has prescribed this drama as a text for the Degree of examination in Arts.

The drama of Asoke by Pandit Khirode Prosad staged at Kohinoor Theatre under the supervision of Girish Chandra revealed Asoke as Chandasoke—Asoke a fighter and powerful man, but the present drama depicts Emperor as Dharma Asoke, who sought to combine wisdom of a sage and piety of a monk, with the prowess of a mighty Emperor to make India a kingdom of righteousness in which the Government should guide and help the people in doing the right. The various edicts of Asoke reveal him as Dharmasoke and the book is based upon many of those edicts. Deshabandhu Dass (C. R. Dass) used to derive great satisfaction and benefit from this book when he was in the Central Jail, Alipore, during the period of of his incarceration in 1921, and used to call it a masterly drama. Asoke has been shown how at first he was only a man of flesh and blood, subject to ordinary passions and desires, but how by ceaseless endeavours and astonishing self-control, by degrees, he rose higher and

higher, till at the end he lived the life of a saint full of resignation and love, a life devoted to the welfare of mankind. He thought within himself that his duty was to look after the welfare of the Kingdom which was not his but his Master's (Budhwa's). Thus he says :—

"Ami Bujhechi, Rajya, Dhan, Kirti Kalap, Kichhu amar noy, Sakali Buddha Deber—Ami Nimitta Matra Chhilam".

"I have understood that this vast kingdom, all wealth and renown all belong to the Lord Buddha—nothing is mine. I am simply the instrument."

The following artists appeared in their different characters on the 3rd December 1910 .—

Bindushak (Emperor)--Nani Lall Dutt, Shuseem (1st son)—Aheendra Nath De, Ashoke—Dani Babu, Beetashoke (brother)—Aparesh Babu, Kunal (Asoke's son)—Sushila, Akal (Homeless & poor)—Mr. Palit, Upa Gupta (Guru)—Haribhuson Babu, Mar—Preonath Babu, Subhdrangi—Prokashmoni, Padmabati—Tarasundari, Devi—Hemanta Kumari, Sanghamitta—Sorojini, Chittahara—Churushila, Tishwarakshita—Tincowrie (junior).

Thus while the Minerva Theatre attained the highest position both in income and reputation, it passed however, through some

unexpected changes and had to face certain difficulties in its way which for the information of our readers we ought to mention here.

We have said before that ever since Babu Chuni Lall Deb bade good bye to the Minerva in Feb. 1905, Monomohan Pandey began to conduct the Theatre with help of Mohendra Babu for which the latter used to receive one third of the profits. Monomohan Babu's interest was that of a lessee only.

The whole theatre-building with all appurtenances was, however, sold on auction as we have seen, and Mr. Pandey purchased it on Rs. 60,000/-. Besides, he added to the house with a Hotel now the Minerva Cabin, just to the east of the Theatre at a cost of Rs. 6000/-.

It was settled in 1908 on July 3, between Pandey and Mitra, that Mitra who had always been regarded as Partner would have one third share apportioned in his name, as soon as he would pay one third of the above cost on payment of Rs. 22,000/-.

In 1910, differences arose between them specially with regard to management and the advance money for mofussil contracts for which

Mohendra Babu is said to have felt some misgivings. Pandey was also required to stay for some time at Beneras for the construction of a house and a temple for Shiva—as desired by his father. Mohendra Babu insisted now on the theatre being managed by either of the two, instead by the two and the following things were done in settlement :

(1) Monomohon Babu executed a deed of sale for one third of the house etc, and got Rs. 22,000/- from Mohendra Babu. The latter became now out and out one third proprietor.

(2) Mohendra Babu became lessee of Pandey for two third share for which he was to pay Rs. 1,480 a month as rent,

N.B.—(Rs. 1000- as honorarium, Rs. 400/- rent for 2/3 share and Rs. 80/- as rent for the drop-scene in Panday's share (2/3) but this calculation was not to be entered in the deed.)

(3) The arrangement was to be in force for ten years.

(4) The previous partnership was to be dissolved.

(5) It was also stipulated that in case of

Mohendra Babu's earlier death, the management would go to Pandey.

After this arrangement was made through deeds executed on the 11th June 1911, Pandey left for Benares and Mohendra Babu resolved upon continuing the theatre on his exclusive responsibility under the guidance and management of Girish Chandra Ghose.

An opera—Mr. A. K. Mitra's "Rakampher" adapted from R. B. Sheridan's master-piece "School for Scandal" was billed for 17th June 1911—the first opening night of Mohendra Mitra's theatre. But alas, just two days before performance, to his great astonishment came the news that about eight artists including two leading ones—Palit & Aparesh Babu had left and there was none to act the part of Ja lim. Before this, the nightingale of Minerva, Susilabala, had also left for Amarendra's Great National on a higher salary and handsome bonus and the prospective actress Nari Sundari, rather grown dull, would be a poor substitute. Mortified, Mohendra Babu came to Girish ; but the old man lost no heart. He encouraged the staff and himself began to appear in the role of Jalim. This was the day when with a new piece "Jivone Morone" Amarendra bowed

to the audience in the Great National and as usual there was no lack of announcements and flourishing of trumpets. "Jivone Morone" had a packed house no doubt, but Minerva also fared not worse.

Then came the simultaneous performance of *Balidan* at both Great National and Minerva and although Amarendra Nath was very fortunate in securing the original Jobi and Mohit (Miss Susila and Mr. Khetra Mitra) he, however, was no match for Girish. The momentous day, however, came at last when on the 15th July both the theatres announced *Balidan* for the performance. Girish was then in imperfect state of health and it was raining in torrents from the evening, and when Girish arrived at the theatre not more than sixty rupees, tickets were sold. Mohendra Babu and all others asked him not to act that night as Karunamaya has to appear bare-bodied in certain scenes. By the time however the play commenced—the sales came up to Rs. 400/-. To do or not to do—was the problem. But Girish said—"as so many have come even in this foul weather to see my acting of this part, I shall not deprive them of that pleasure."

The ordeal was passed and Minerva's reputation maintained, but Girish had to pay dearly

for this. This was the last night of his appearance on the stage. He caught cold, and in the next six or seven months he lived, he could never appear before the foot-light. Like the drama, the last performance of the dramatist too ended in grim tragedy. It cost, as we shall see, his own life.

Then was billed *Chandra Gupta* a master-piece of Mr. D. L. Roy from July 22, 1911, in which Girish would have appeared as Alexendar, had his health permitted. Yet the piece with Dani Babu as Chanakya was always a great attraction and even in his last days baffled all opposition of the modern actors, but of this here-after.

Chanakya was a great empire-builder like Bismark of Germany and Dani Babu represented him on the stage with unique histrionic art. The acting was masterly, even outdoing himself in the court-scene where Bachal puts him into indignities and also in the last scene where he discovers his long-missing daughter, Atreyi, begging alms with her foster-father,—formerly a robber, now a blind beggar. *

* Cast—Alexendar—Pandit Haribhusan, Seluccus—Nanilal Dutt, Chandra Gupta—Preonath Ghosh, Chandra Ketu—N. Banerjee, Mura—Hemanto Kumari, Helen—Sarojini, Chhaya—Nari Sundari, Nanda—Ahin De, Bachal—Handu Babu, Katyaon—Hiralal Babu, Atreyi—Neroda Sundari.

"Chandra Gupta" became so popular that it was performed by the College-students of almost all the colleges of Bengal and before their performance they did scarcely fail to witness the unique performance of Chanakya by Dani Babu.

Now as to the performance at Minerva, Nari Sundari was quite delightful for her songs and gentle acting full of tenderness and likewise was Atreyi represented by Neroda Sundari for her two famous songs :

(1) "Jakhana Shaghona Gagana Garaje"

(2) "Oi Mahasindhur Opar Theke Ki Sangit Bhese Ashe"

Bachal's comic acting was superb. The title role was taken by Babu Prio Nath Ghose who also did justice to the part, On the whole, Chandra Gupta crowned Minerva with success and its reputation was well maintained. As however, *Bajirao* was the counter-attaction at Great National, the pecuniary success at first was not so great, so "Punar Janma" with Hiralal Chatterjee as Jadob Chakrobarty had to be added. In the meantime, Tincowri's services were also secured and Tara also came in. The Minerva, therefore, could boast of a unique combination of artists and it gave Girish Chandra great satisfaction in his death-bed.

It was about this time that *Sarala* and *Durgesh Nandini* were revived for some nights and the following casts were specially attractive. Tincowrie—Shyama and Bimala, Tara—Promoda and Ayesha, Nari—Sarala—Dani Babu—Gadhadhar, and Osman, Hari Bhusan Babu—Sashi Bhusan, Prionath Babu—Bidhu Bhusan etc.— These pieces were now and then enlivened by the comic farce of Aleek Babu from the pen of Babu Jyatirindra Nath Tagore where Tincowri played the part of Hemangini, Tara Sundari— as Prasanna, Dani Babu as Gadadhar, Hari Bhusan Babu as Satya Sindhu and the comic actor Handu Babu as Aleek Babu.

The year 1911 saw great changes in the dramatic world. Amarendra was in the meridian of his glory, Kohinoor was also showing its last brilliancy with Biswamitra and Minerva fared gloriously with Chandra Gupta. At such a time Girish Chandra's last drama— "Tapobal"—the triumph of Tapo or devotion, was brought out. It illustrates in Biswamitra how through devotional faith one is capable of attaining great height by tiding over all obstacles and in Basista the efficacy of the self-less performance of one's duty through truth and Ahimsa. This is the last gift of Girish for the stage and his country and the last

proved by far the best. It is philosophy and action combined and with the veteran artists * proved a great success—having a run for successive weeks, commencing from Nov. 18, 1911.

As Girish was ill, the artists had to come to his house for the necessary training. Biswamitra was as grand as before and both Haribhusan Babu and Tarasundari matched him wonderfully.

The duet of Sadananda and Brahmanya Deb was the most enjoyable. The songs of Vedamata were extemely sweet and all the parts were most creditably represented. The book deals with highly intricate problems of metaphysics, yet they were treated with such graceful case, side by side, with music, humour, dance and other sensational interests that they were gratefully received by the audience with delight and attention.

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* Brahmmanya Deb—Neerada Sundari. Viswamitra —Dani Babu, Sadanonda (Vidushoka)—Handu Babu, Vasishta—Hari Bhuson Bhattacherya, Trisbonku—Preonath Ghose, Shaktri and Ambareesh's priest—Aheendra Babu, Brahma & General of Biswamitra—Satyendra Babu, Kalmashpad & Indra—Hiralal Babu, Dharmaraj—Narendranath Sinha, Badari—Tincowrie, Arundhati — Prokashmoni, Sunetra — Tarasundari. Vedamata—Norisundari Brahmin Boy—Shashimukhi, Shdrioshek, Parasar—Parulbala.

The success of the play was warmly recorded by the local papers and we quote only one from "Bengalee" here.

"Last Saturday the Minerva Theatre staged before a crowded and appreciative house that masterpiece of religious drama the "Tapobal" by the veteran dramatist Babu Girish Chandra Ghose. The performance was a splendid success and although the characterizations in the drama were the most subtle and varied, the actors and actresses were fully equal to the task and acquitted themselves admirably to the delight of the audience. Among the scenes—the Pushkar, the illuminated place of Bishwamitra, the aerial flight, a lake in the Himalaya and the Saptarshi Mandal deserve particular notice. The drama represents to the Indian audience the power of ascetic austerities as mentioned in the Vedas and the Puranas, how power of spiritual acquisition enables the votary to raise himself to the highest dignity unsurpassed by all."

The drama brought home to his countrymen the supreme height of spiritual and moral perfection to which its author had attained. Heavenly light illumined his mind and it seemed that he was more in communion with the spirit of his Guru. The more was his body in decay, smitten with disease, the closer seemed to be the contact. At such a time when he was enjoying heavenly peace, the word Ram-

krishna was uttered thrice by the poet, after he had passed three sleepless nights, and he then lay in eternal slsep on the 9th Feb. 1912. (Magh 25, 1318 B.S.).

A colossal figure passed away from Bengal and the whole of Calcutta came to pay their last respect to the poet and artist and on the 10th all theaters were closed, that being still a Saturday.

National feeling became vocal in a meeting of the Town Hall on Sept. 6, 1912 which all the culture of Calcutta attended, hundreds standing for want of seats. The present writer who attended the meeting had to stand up all the while, but the whole scene appeared to him to be one where the tributes paid were so natural and spontaneous that the whole nation felt as if deceased was their nearest and dearest.

Maharajadhiraj Bahadoor of Burdwan Bijoyachand Mahatab on the motion of Mr. Sarada Charan Mitra Ex-judge, Calcutta High Court and Rai Jatindranath Chowdhury of Taki was voted to the chair. Babu Kiron Chandra Dutt, composed a suitable poem and Babu Deb Kanta Bagchi sang a song composed by Babu Behari Lall Sarkar—Editor of the "Bangabashi."

The President in a feeling speech referred, amongst other matters of head and heart to the

devotional side of the poet calling him "Khepa Mayer Khepa Chhele"—the headstrong son of a reckless Mother.

Sir Gurudas Banerjee, the famous ex-judge of the Calcutta High Court, spoke feelingly—"People often could not take a man at his true worth when alive, but the community began to feel its loss when a great man was dead. That was exactly the case with Girish Chandra. He was a class-fellow of Girish and held him in high esteem. He would even go so far as to say that Girish Chandra Ghosh was an object of great adoration. In spite of the evils that might exist in the stage it could not be questioned for a moment that he was also a great teacher of men and was capable of doing immense good to the society."

Babu Bhupendra Nath Bose, afterwards a Member of the India Council, expressed that twenty years ago, men of culture and refinement used to shun the Bengali stage as an undesirable place but with its gradual improvement in all respects it was now a useful institution of the country and enjoyed the sympathy of the educated men. The change was unmistakable. The gentlemen connected with the stage were no longer looked down upon. Besides the deceased, another name—that of

Babu Amrita Lall Bose, was also held in esteem by the people generally.

Babu Mati Lall Ghose, Editor, Amrita Bazar Patrika, and Babu Panchkori Banerjee, Editor, also spoke on the occasion, but the most moving and stirring speech was that of Babu Bepin Ch. Pal, then a leader of public opinion, who addressed the gathering thus :

"Unlike many of our poets who soared high into the region of idealism and made a display of their genius on the people beneath them, Girish Chandra was a creature and a poet of the world. His genius grew in the dust of the world and rose higher and still higher until freed from all its impurities it shone forth in all its glory. There-in lay the greatness of the poet and that was why Girish Chandra could write his Bilwamangal."

Babu Sarada Charan Mitra said—"Girsh Chandra was extraordinarily fond of study. One day, I went to see him in an untimely hour. I found him busy reading the History of thc 19th century···He was as much a virtuous man as he was a poet. Some of his virtures are not ordinarily seen....···

Mr. A. L. Bose said—"I was a labourer wnue Girish Chandra was a Mason, in building the

stage. In his composition he was not satisfied until it fully satisfied him. Once during the Dress-rehearsal one full act of "Chaitanya Lila" was thoroughly changed and recast."

Thus people of all shades of opinion, high and low, gave expression to their sincere feelings of sorrow and respect for the Bengali Stage and its father, the greatest Bengali dramatist, and the poet.

This was not all. Condolence-meetings were held all over the country. Every class of people expressed their sincere sorrow at the great National loss caused by Girish's death. There was a meeting even of the Calcutta actresses at the Star Theatre, presided over by Babu Amarendra Nath Dutta, where Sushilabala, Nari Sundari, Basanta Kumari, Rani Sundari and others most feelingly paid their homage to Girish for providing them with honest occupations and for imparting to them messages of religion and of Harinam through his dramas.

Before the Town Hall meeting was held, all the Bengali Theatres of Calcutta combined together to show a joint performance for raising funds for the memorial of the dramatist ! and on the 27th Aug : 1912 his *Balidan* and *Pandav Gourava* were staged at the Kohinoor Theatre.

The house was over-crowded and the collections amounted to Rs. 3600/- the prices of tickets being raised on that occasion, as Pit to Rs. 2/- in place of Re. 1/-, Stall Rs. 3/- for Rs. 2/- and so on. Mr. Amarendranath Dutt was the organiser and Babus Amritalal Bose, Monomohon Pandey, S. K. Roy and himself issued an appeal for the preservation of a suitable memorial of the founder and father of the Bengali Stage.

The following artists took part in the per formances :—

Balidan : A. L. Bose—Karunamoy, Rupchand—Upendra Mitra (Star), Dulal—Dani Babu, Mohit—Khetro Mitra, Ghonoshaym—Monindra Mondal, Kisore—Aparesh Babu, Kalighatak—Akshoy Chakraborty, Ramanath—Hiralal Chatterjee, Inspector—Nagendra Gohsh, Rajlaksmi—Rani Sundari, Sareswati—Tara, Jashomati—Hemanta (Minerva), Jobi—Sushila, Matangini—Prokasmoni, Kironmoyi—Kironbala, Hiranmoyi—Charubala, Jyotirmoyi—Shushila (junior), Jhee—Chapala.

Nari Sundari Sang—"Aiu kahan meri···, Sushila sang "Bhatar Keman misti," Kashi Babu and Basanta Kumari sang the duet "Ke poati rashabati··"

Pandab Gourab : Tincowrie being absent, the part of Shubhadra was taken by Sushilabala ; Bheem—Amarendra Nath, Konchuki—Pandit Haridhuson, Bhisma — Tarak Palit. Dandi—Preonath Ghose,

Judhistir — Nani Lal Dutta, Arjoon — Gopal Das Bhatterjee, Krishna—Hiralal Chatterjee, Urbashi—Promoda Sundari, Gheserani— Nari Sundari.

After the curtain rose, the audience listened to a poem of Amrita Babu with tears in their eyes. It was read by Amar Babu.

Thus was honoured the great poet, dramatist aud actor manager of Bengal who by life long devotion for about 50 years had built and perfected the Bengali Stage. He wanted that the theatre should not only be a place of mere amusement but of public instruction as well—a platform for the creation of public opinion, and an institution for mass-education. He succeeded in his mission, but at great personal sacrifice. For his association with women * on the stage, he was looked down, but he cared not. He has given the country much—The Bengali Stage became a great institution and is still flourish-

* The world has greatly changed since Girish's time. Old conservative ideas had to give place to liberalism and progress. The former irrational odium does no longer attach to the stage. Many educated men have taken up the vocation of an actor, and the present writer offers no apology for appearing as Karunamoy with professional actresses on the stage during the Centenary celebrations of Girish Chandra, held under the auspices of the "Girish Parished" on the boards of the Minerva Theatre on four occasions.

ing and Girish was its father. He deserves thus the greatest homage of the people of his country.

The Great Desha-Bandhu Chitta Ranjan Dass of Bengal had always felt Girish's loss very keenly and he always used to say that Girish was a great savant. How much he appreciated the great dramatist—may be gleaned from the observations he made from the chair, while presiding over Girish Chanra's anniversary-meeting in February 1924 at the Monomohan Theatre :—

"......Girish was not only a great poet, and writer, but his writings breathe the spirit of Nationalism, Religion and reformation of a true Bengali. He kept up, nay rejuvinated the above special traditions of Bengal and preserved the continuity from Chandi Das right down to his age. His dramas are not written after the style and pattern of European or of Anglicised dramas but are thoroughly imbued with the spirit of Bengal. His dramas, are Bengalees' dramas, they fully represent the sentiments of the Bengalees and have a great place in the Nation-building of Bengal which ultimately leads up to Swaraj. Indeed the title "Mahakabi" has never been so figttingly applied as to Girish Chandra.

"I do not belive in European culture. Those who say earth for earth's sake are gross materialists and have no right to speak about culture. Religion and life are not separate entities. Those who separate both, lose both. Girish Chandra was fully possessed of his in-individuality and he did not require to go to Europe and America to purchasee fame there. He remained contented with Bengal and Benglees. He lived here, worked here, and here in Bengal that Fame has presented him with laurels. The time is not far off when the West will come to Bengal and study our language, poetry and philosophy with pride, and take pride in the culture of the East. Then will Girish, a true Bengali, a true poet of Bengal and a disciple of Ramkrishna be fully known to the west and appreciated and admired there."

It may be worth mention that Girish centenary celebrations are being held this year throughout India.

CHAPTER III

MINERVA THEATRE & UPEN BABU.

The lamented death of Girish Chandra was followed by the death of Babu Mohendra Mitra also on May 9, 1912 and Minerva again fell into a crisis.

Since June 7, 1911, when Mohendra Babu was managing the Theatre with Girish's help, the theatre was much improved with furniture largely added to. With his death, these now came to be in possession of Mohendra Babu's brother Babu Upendra Kumar Mitra who took Letters of Administration—from the High Court, on behalf of and as the guardian of Mohendra Babu's only son Babu Sisir Kumar Mitra, who was then minor. In the meantime Babu Monomohon Pandy came from Beneras and took possession of the theatre on the plea that according to the deed of agreement the theatre would be managed by him (Pandey). Pandey got most of the artists on his side. Disputes arose between the parties and the matter came up to

the High Court for decision, * on Upendra Babu's plaint which disclosed :—

"That when he was in possession of the Minerva Theatre and was managing it, the Defendant (Mr. Pandey) on tbe 13th May 1912, with the assistance of a number of Goondas or professional ruffians forcibly entered into the said premises and took forcible possession of the same."

Upendra Babu prayed for the appointment of a Receiver.

Monomohan Babu in his written statement denied those allegations and contended that possession was taken with the consent of Upen Babu.

Mr. Hari Das Bose Bar-at-law was appointed by the High Court to examine the accounts of the theatre since the purchase in 1905, as on this, the period of partnership would largely depend.

* Suit No. 295 of 1913, High Court of Judicature at Fort William in Calcutta. Messers B. C. Mitter, C. C. Ghose instructed by Panna Lall De for Upen Babu and Messers S. P. Singh, C. R Das, P. R. Das & N. Sarkar instructed by Manual Agarwalla for Monomohan Babu.

The case continued for some time and the following preliminary order was passed on July 24, 1913 :—

(1) Mr. Monomohan Pandey was to deposit Rs. 750/- a month with the Registrar of the High Court, original side, till the disposal of of the suit, and the theatre to be managed by him.

(2) Mr. Pandey was to give security for all rent from 9th May 1912 (Date of Mohendra Babu's death) to 30th, June 1913, at the rate of Rs. 750/-

(3) Monomohan Babu was to give security of Rs. 5,000/- for the goods alleged to have been received from the Minerva Theatre.

(4) Monomohan Babu would not be allowed to remove any ariticle concerning the Minerva Theatre except for business.

It was made clear that the above order would however, have no effect on the rights of the respective parties. Thus the theatre continued to be managed by Mr. Pandey but in 1915 matters took a serious turn. He had some time ago purchased the Kohinoor stage at Sheriff's sale and now during the pendency of the suit Monomohan Babu removed

all scenes, stage & dress etc. and took all artists there to conduct the Minerva Theatre on that stage.

The date of this alleged removal was sometime in the early part of August when under the name "Minerva", Monomohon Babu got Girish Chandra's "Kala Pahar" staged on August 7, 1915 * on the Kohinoor Board.

As soon as Upendra Babu heard of the removal, he immediately prayed for an order of injunction. Mr. Justice A. Chowdhury who heard the petition, wanted to be assured that a proper person who would manage the Minerva in its board, was there, before he would pass orders. Upendra Babu came forward and an order was passed giving him the right to become the lessee. Monomohan Babu was enjoined from using the name "Minerva" at the

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* Cast of Kalapahar as revived on 7th Aug.

Chintamoni—Dani Babu, Kalapahar—Preonath Ghose, Bireswar—Nagendra Ghose, Chanchala—Tara Sundari, Murala—Prokas Moni, Eman—Sashi Mukhi, Leto—Hira Lall Babu.

N. B.—In my work "Dani Babu" P—124, date of opening has been wrongly given as 17th Aug. 1914, In Sachitra Sisir too—dated 31-5-41, date was wrongly given as 31st Aug. 1915. The most authentic date is Aug. 7, 1915. *Author.*

Kohinoor stage. The rent of the Minerva was fixed as Rs. 1,050/- out of which Upendra Babu was to pay Rs. 700/- to Mr. Pandey and Rs. 350/ to Sisir Kumar Mitra (Mohendra Babu's son). Hence forward Upendra Babu commenced theatre at the Minerva Stage in his own name as its lessee from October 2,1915, and Monomohan Babu named his Theatre at the Kohinoor stage as "*Monomohan Theatre.*"

We shall pause here to give an account of the dramas staged at Minerva during Monomohan Babu's incumbency after Mohendra Babu's death.

After Girish Chandra's death, Dani Babu had been made manager by Mohendra Babu and Daria (Sourin Mukerjee) was staged on 6th April 1912. After that two minor operas "Media" (Kshirode Babu) and "Amla Madhoor" (Kali Mitra) were put in boards, but the most memorable piece was Girish Chandra's posthumous drama, *Grihalakshmi* † staged on Sept. 21, 1912 with the following cast :—

Upen—Dani Babu, Sailen—N. Banerjee, Hiru Ghosal—Aparesh Babu, Nirode—Kshetro Mitra, Monmotho—Satyen De, Baidya Nath—Nagendra

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† The fifth act remained to be finished and it was so done by Babu Devendra Nath Bose, for which an acknowledgement was made by Dani Babu.

Ghosh, Netai—Preanath Ghosh, Siboo Ukil—Mr. Tarok Palit, Sarat—Hira Lall Chatterjee, Abadhoot—Hari Bhusan Bhattacharjee, Satis—Anukul Batabyal, Inspector—Madhusudhan Bhatta, Beroja—Tara Sundari, Torongini—Prokashmoni, Sorojini—Sorojini (Neri) Fuli—Neroda Sundari, Knmudini—Charushila, Monikirtoni—Hemanta Kumari.

On the opening night at the beginning, a song composed by Girish Chandra's amanausis and biographer, Babu Abinash Chandra Ganguly was sung by all artists in chorus, the concluding couplet being ;—

She Je Banger Gourab, Banger Shourab,
Banger Kaustuvahar,
Banger Girish, Banger Garrick,
Banger Shakespeare"

The play was a brilliant success and all the parts were rendered very ably. Amongst others Dani Babu was at his best. The scene where in the domestic quarrel Upendra taking side of his brother, fell fainting (Act II) with the cry (No doctor, call pleader, raise the wall of partition and break the temple of worship) and the scenes of madness—"Mari Mari Nerod Chandra Re" "Maharaj Nando Kumarer hoe Chhillo, Nirer o habe" etc. were specially touching and heart-rending.

This tragic part rendered by Dani Babu was in keeping with Prasanna Kumar and Serajuddulla and it was considered that he excelled himself in such part. It may be worth mentioning that the part of Upen was written by Girish for himself.

Tara Sundari maintained a dignity worthy of Baḍa Bou who finally saved the family-name and represented to a finish affection and duty both combined.

The whole audience and the theatrical authorities were astonished beyond measure that Dani Babu could display such excellence in acting even without the help of his lamented father. The beginning thus proved a great success.

Mr. Banerjee used to play the part of Sailen very well. There was nothing which could be taken exception to. The last scene where he lamented his dying brother, was most touching. Kshetro Mitra, Palit and Aparesh Babu did well and Prakas-Moni was at her best.

On the first night of Grihalakshi, a new actress appeared for the first time on the Bengali Stage who gained much notoriety hereafter as a good songstress and in acting tender feelings. This was Ascharja Moyee who

sang a song in the house of Kumudini that night.

Minerva then took "Chandra Sekhar" Aparesh Babu and Tara Sundari appearing in the roles of Chandra Sekhar and Saibalini. Dani Babu acted the part of Protap, Khetra Babu used to appear as Laurence Foster and Ascharjo Moyee as Dalani.

On 10th May 1913 "Bhisma" by Kshirode Prorad was staged with Dani Babu as Bhisma, Palit as Parsuram, Sorojini as Amba. After a few nights Tara Sundari used to appear as Amba and her expression with the words "Bhismer Needhan ek Matra Uddashya Amar" was superb.

9th August, 13, *Bidaya Abhishap* was staged but when next "Bhaigya Chakra" was put on boards, Dani Babu fell ill. In the meantime Natyacharya Amrita Lall Bose came here and his "Nava Jouban" was staged on Dec. 20, 1913 with himself as Basanta Kumar and Tara as Aloka.

After having recovered Dani Babu appeared in *Neoti* (Kshirode) as Bhanru Dutta and as Antony in Cleopetra (Promotho Bhattacharya).

In *Aheria* (December 26, 1914), Aparesh

Babu as Moolraj and Neroda as Ketu were specially effective.

In the meantime "*Khasdakhal*" too was put here with the author in the role of Netai, Dani Babu-Mohit, Charushila as Giribala, Tara Sundari-Mokshada, Mr. Palit as Thakurda, but with all good acting Minerva was no match for Khasdakhal at Star.

After the piece *Ahooti* by Aparesh Babu based on "Signs of the Cross" was staged on the 7th March, an operaic piece *Hulosthool* (disorders) was put here. *Beerraja* was however the last piece staged on 26th June 1915, after which Mr. Pandey left Minerva for good.

Babu Upendra Mitra now set his whole heart in improving Minerva. He made Aparesh Chandra as manager and secured the services of Tara Sundari, Nari Sundari (of Star fame) Mr. Palit, Prokasmoni, Neroda, Charushila and others as artists.

"*Sinhal Bijoy*" the posthumous work of late Mr. D. L. Roy was put on boards on the opening night—October 2, 1915 and all the parts specially Sinhabahu of Aparesh Babu and Leela of Nari Sundari were very good. The latter also enchanted the audience with her songs.

The remaining Cast was as follows :—

Bijoy—Palit, Kubeni—Tara.

Aparesh Babu's "*Subhadristi*" (Dec. 4) and Banganari * (March 25, 1916) the second social drama of D. L. Roy attracted audience but *Ramanooj* (opened on July 15, 1916) with Tara Sundari in the main role upto three acts was marvellously successful. It drew audience very much and fetched sufficient money to Upendra Babu. The tone and gravity of the drama was very serious.

Bange Rathor and other pieces were of a mediocre nature but '*Kinnari*' (Aug. 17, 1918) again with songs and dances drew large crowds. This opera from the pen of Kshirode Prosad of Alibaba fame gave money to Upendra Babu as Alibaba had given to Amarendra, although tastes of audience received a deterioration from such light pieces. The cast was as follows :—

Kinnari—Neroda, Sudhon—Kunja Babu, Dhanopati—Kali Charan Banerjee, Makari—Charu Sheela, Kinnara Raj—Nagendra Ghosh,

In 1919 owing to some difference Aparesh Babu left for the Star and Palit, Tara Sundari and Niroda Sundari also accompanied him.

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* It is said that Roy was drawn to draw the social side of marriage from Girish Chandra's "Balidan."

After Aparesh Babu's departure the next piece which attracted audience and maintained Minerva's reputation was *Meeshar Kumari* a drama by Babu Barada Prosanna Das Gupta where 'Naherin' was very ably and artistically done by Miss Sushila Sundari, a new actress who lately joined the stage. Naharin put the actress into lime light and although she has practically retired now, her casual performances of Sarawati in '*Balidan*' are equally successful.

Subashini's Bula was also enchanting. Babu Kunja Chakravorty did well as Aban. Handu Babu, Prea Babu and Angus respectively appeared as Ramesheesh, Samondesa and Kākātuā on 5th July 1919.

Monisha by (Mr. J. N. Gupta I. C. S. late Commissioner, Burdwan Division) was put on January 11, 1920 and Kusum Kumari who had lately joined, acted the part of the heroine well.

The next piece "Kelore Kirti" by Bhupen Banerjee was highly successful with Handu Babu as Kelo, Kunja Babu as Karta and Kartic Babu as Magha, and the house used to be a packed one. Barada Babu's *Nadirshaha* with Handu Babu as the hero, Susila as Begum and Charusila as Akbari may be worth-mentioning.

In 1922, Minerva Theatre was strengthened by two recruits of the new school—Babus

Radhikananda Mukerjee and Naresh Chandra Mitra. After these two gentlemen joined the Minerva, they appeared in "Chandra Gupta" and "Shajahan" (Radhikananda as Antigonus and Aurongzeb and Naresh Mitra as Chanakya and Shajahan), Palaramer Swadeshikata was next put on June, 18, 1922, Radhika Babu appearing as Palaram and Naresh Mitra as Mr. Jacob. The part of Palaram was very well rendered. Radhika Babu also did very well as Mr. Singh in *Bibaha Bibhrat.*

Thus while the Minerva Theatre under Upen Babu was maintaining its previous reputation, a very unlucky star came in the ascendant. On October 18, 1922, it suddenly caught fire and was burnt to ashes.

The last piece acted was Bhupen Banerjee's opera "Phoolashara" with Subashini as Madan and Navotara as Ratee.

Upendra Babu is not, however, a man to be dis-spirited at this. He had the requisite perseverance, got the theatre again rebuilt through the help of a financier and opened Mahatap Chandra Ghose's "Atma Darshan" in August 1925.

During the intervening period Upendra Babu arranged performances to be staged in

Mofussil and sometimes in the Monomohan Theatre and afterwards showed some performances at the Alfred Stage also, of which the following are worth-mentioning :·····

1923, May 30 Rakomri (Barada Prosanna)

Sept. 9, 1924—Jivon Juddhwa (Monomohan Roy) adapted from Victor Hugo's Les Miserable, Meghnad—Kartic Babu, Inspector —Satyen Babn.

Nov. 8, 1924—Jore Barat (Bhupendra Banerjee) Joysankar—Kunja Babu, Barrister—Kartic Babu.

Dec. 25, 1924—Kritanter Bangadarshan. Kritanta—Kunja Babu, Mahabeer—Handu Babu.

1925 April 14,—Thaker Mela—a concourse of cheats (Dr. Naresh Sen Gupta) Thak—Handu Babu.

1925 July 18 & 19—Daleem (A three-act drama rendered from the story of Deshbandhu C. R. Dass *) Subashini appearing in the main role with Amulla Dutt as Hero, Tulsi Banerjee as Nabin and Prokashmoni—as quarrelsome mother-in-law.

The performance of *Atma Darshan* commencing from August 8, 1925 met with high encomiums and ran successively for a number of nights with :—

Handu Babu as Mono-Raja, Tulsi Banerjee as Kama, Satyen De as Krodh, Nagendra Bala, Nanibala Gua as Queens, Subashini as Rati, Angurbala as Bibek, Ashmantara as Bairagya, Renubala as Sukh.

* Deshbandhu passed away on June 16, 1925.

Barada Dass Gupta's *Satya-Bhama* was staged on Decembe 25 with Subashini in the name-role.

In 1926, Bhupen Banerjee's "*Bangali*" was staged on 20th March, with Kunja Chakraberty as Dino Das, Nagendrabala his wife, Handu Babu as Sukh Das, Subashini as Bhikarini, Kartic Babu as Ramlochan, Asmantara as Padma and Jiten Ghosh as Nishit.

Upendra Babu was succssful in enlisting the co-operation of Natyacharya Amrita Lall Bose whose "Byapika Vidaya" was a highly entertaining piece. Of the artists Nagendrabala's Byapika was the best and next might be mentioned—Sanjib Chowdhury represented by Kunja Babu. Hiralal Chatterjee as Ghonosyam and Satyendra De and Sasimukhi as Pushpa Charan and Minee, Suren Roy as Jotiswar, Subashini as Lila Lahiri and Angoor as Chamatkar also did well. This was staged on July 1926 and followed by Bhupendra's "Nari Rajjey," K. C. Roy's Dharmaghat and Bhupen Banerjee's "Juga Mahatmya" on 24th December, which was a parody on Rabindra Nath.

Amrita Babu was the dramatic director and Dani Babu became the manager. He had not accepted position any where after the period of

agreement with Art Theatre was over. "Chhataki" an unpublished opera of Girish Chandra, as is so told, was put on board during the X'mas 1927 where Dani Babu took the part of Senapati. This was followed by Sripada Mukerjee's "Ramayone Art" and Barada Dass Gupta's *Nartaki* on 10th December, where Dani Babu and Ashmantara respectively took the parts of Oshman and Nartaki.

In 1928, May 5, Amrita Babu's *Jajnasheni* was staged with Dani Babu as Dhritarastra, Handu Babu as Krishna, Sashimukhi as Droupadi and Kunja Babu as Arjuna.

Neither the Minerva Theatre nor Dani Babu suited each other and after a short while he left the service and was greeted by the Monomohon Theatre as Manager there.

Jaldhar Chatterjee's *Satyer Sandhan* was then put on boards at Minerva on 11th August 1928. The cast was as follows :—

Arindam—Sarat Chatterjee, Chandana—Bhumen Roy, Saronga Dev—Kartic Babu, Adhira—Shashimukhi, Peari—Angurbala, Subadana—Angurbala, Kabi—Krishna Chandra De, Purohit—Probhat Singh.

In Dec. 22, 1928, "Jati-Chhyoota" by Sarat Ghosh was played with the above artists heading Handu Babu as Raja Gonesh and Nagendrabala as Tripura Sundari, and was followed by

Subhadra (13th July) and Sree on the 21st December 1929 respectively.

In the meantime Babu Ahindra Choudury (then popular with the part of Mriganka) left Star for the Minerva and became its Manager * (April 1930). He first apeared as Chandradhar in *Behula* with Asman as Behula, Sarat Chatterjee as Lakhindra and Charushila as Monibhadra. This was succeeded by other old plays *Misar Kumari*, *Shajahan*. He was next selected for Doctor Sadashiva in Jaladhar's Rangarakhi in May 1930, the leading part in Bhupen Banerjee's *Desher Dak* staged on December 6, 1930, for Rudra pratap in Abhijat in June as also for *Samudra Monthon* by Surendra Banerjee in Aug. 31, 1931.

Bhupen Banerjee's farce *Dharpakar*, Dr. Suren Roy Choudhury's 'opera' *Manbhanjan* (staged on 15th August 1931 and Satis Ghatak's Padadhuli—two weeks after that, may be worth-mentioning.

Alamgeer was revived with Ahindra Babu in the main role. Next he appears as "Bhabananda" in *Protapaditya*.

On October 3, 1931—"*Chandra Nath*" dramatised from the famous novelist Sarat

* He had also tried in 1926, 1927 to join Minerva but had to be enjoined by court.

Chandra's novel was staged * with himself as Kailas Khuro, Sarat Chaterjee as Chandra Nath, Hiralal Chatterjee as Brojokisore and Charushila as Sulochona, Asman Saraju, Bedana Harakali, Probhat Sinha as Monisankar. It was followed by Bholanath Kabyasastri's *Basuki* † staged on December 19, 1931.

In 1932 two pieces in which Ahindra Babu made some mark were *Puroheet* staged in July 9, and *Debjani* staged on 10th December. In the former he took the part of Raj Puroheet Matanga. Charushila that of Rani Sandhya and Nirupama of Suchitra, Joynarayan Mukerjee as Bhil Sardar—

In "Debjani" the cast was as as follows :—

Sukracharya—Ahindra, Jajati—Sarat Chaterjee, Ghantakarna—Kunja Babu, Brishaparba—Hiralal, Debjani—Charushila, Sarmistha—Bedana.

Ahindra Babu was here till first week of 1933, but Minerva's position was not improved inspite of a high salary (Rs 500 a month) being paid to him. There were differences and he

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* Manmotho Bose's "*Andhere Aloe*" and Satis Ghatak's "Hante Handi" and "Agni Sikha" may be noticed.

† Basuki—Ahindra, Janmejoy—Sarat Chatterjee, Kripacharjya—Hiralal Chatterjee, Indra—Probhat Sinha, Asteek—Renubala, Noyanneela—Charushila, Kusumatonni—Subashini, Jagatkaru—Bedanabala.

left for the Art Theatre Limited, and appeared there for the first time as Shyama Kanta on the 12th March, 1933.

After continuing for some months, Upendra Babu hit upon the plan of reducing the prices of admission varying from 4 as to Rs. 2 and continuing performances for six days a week. The play lasted only for two hours and a half each occasion. The plan proved successful from monetary point of view and the following pieces staged in Minerva deserve passing notice :—

1933, May—*Saktirmontra* (Jaladhar) with Sarat as Saktidhar, Ranjit Roy Dhumketu, Angurbala Nagini, Bedanabala Kamala and Tarakbala Sunanda.

1933—December 23, "Bamanabatar." 1934—September 29, Sudhirendra Raha's "Maratha Mogul". The next play Siva Sakti—continued for more than 200 nights with Sarat Chatterjee as Mahadeb, Miss Light Cachi, Joynarayan Tarakashoor.

1935—August 31 Birja Sulka (S. Raha).

1936—Sivarjoon—(Sudhir Raha), Dashyoo—(Ashu Sanyal), Parasooram—(Barada Das Gupta).

1937—June—Gayatirtha (Mohendra Gupta) Gayasoor—Sarat Chatterjee, Sagarika—Miss Light. December 17, Dharmadwanda.

In 1938, Upendra Babu left the Minerva Theatre and became the lessee of the "Star" and his activities will be described there.

After Mr. Upendra Mitra left Minerva for the Star, Mr. Hemen Mazumdar took the lease. He too followed Upen Babu in the cheap performances-plan. "Vishnumaya" was staged on 16th July, 1938 Jaladhar's "Naree Dharma" and next "Partha Sarathi" followed it.

Messrs Delwar Hossein and Chandi Banerjee became lessee in 1939 and on September 16, 1939, Mr. Mohendra Gupta's "*Abhijan*" was staged with :—

Nirmalendu Lahiri—as Mohomed Togolok, Nibhanoni—as Rana of Vijoynagar, Subashini—as Gulbanoo.

Minerva's next piece was "Devi Durga" during X'mas, and Monilal Banerjee's "Annapurnar Mandir" on March 3, 1940.

The condition of theatre was growing from bad to worse and the two lessees now approached Mr. N. C. Gupta managing Director, Chingreehatta Bone Mill Ld. who now came to its rescue with money. The management was now converted to a Limited company with Mr. Gupta as Chairman of the Board, the other directors of which being Messrs Dhiren Mukerjee, Delwar Hosein and Chandi Banerjee.

Ashutosh Sanyal's *Bandini* was staged on May 25, 1940, Dhiren Mukerjee's *Jayanti* on June 7, and *Kabi Kalidas* on July 12, 1941.

None of these pieces, nor "*Black out*" and "*House-full*" fetched much money to Minerva.

Mr. Durgadas Banerjee's services were next secured and Mr. Sachin Sengupta's "*Supriar Kirti*" was put on boards as the first drama under his direction on May 16, 1942 with himself (Banerjee) as Nilambar, Amal Banerjee as Swetambar, Santi Gupta as Supriya and Uma Mukerjee as Syama.

Goutam Sen's "*Doctor*" was put on boards on June 6, 1942, with Durgadas as Sekharnath, Bhumen Roy Somnath, Amal as Doctor, Santi Gupta as Asrumati and Niroda as Monimala.

On July 18, 1942, Bidhayak's "*Chirantoni*" was put on boards with Durgadas as Basuki & Dr. Nag, Amal Banerjee as Harihar, Santi Gupta as Kea and Neroda as Miss Chatterjee.

On Nov. 14, 1942, Sachin Sen Gupta's *Kanta O Kamal* adapted from Gay De Maupassant was put on boards with Durgadas as husband and Santi Gupta as wife.

This was last piece in which Durga Babu appeared on the stage. He fell ill and could not therefore appear in Sen Gupta's next piece "Matirmaya"* in January 2, 1943.

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* **Santi—Mallika, Bhumen Roy—Mr. Dutt, Amal Banerjee—Madhob.**

Mr. Banerjee's illness (Cirrhosis of the liver) took a serious turn and on June 22, 1943, while little over 50, he breathed his last at 68, Rashbihari Avenue, Kalighat, and in him the Bengali Stage lost a popular and brilliant figure.

Mr. Nirmalendu Lahiri's services were now secured and the old pieces Serajauddoula, Beesabrikha, Sajahan, Durgeshnandini were revived. Sales improved a bit.

Towards the close of the year, Minerva-Stage performed a very noble act. This was the period when Girish centenary was being celebrated throughout the country and it was quite in the fitness of things that the Minerva theatre founded and made famous by Girish Chandra gave now (fiftieth year of its existence) opportunities to Girish Parishad to commemorate the occasion by staging the dramatist's social tragedy on four nights (Dec. 13, 1943, 11th Feb. 6th March and 7th July 1944) * when some of the distinguished amateurs

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* On the last occasion (July 7, 1944) the noteworthy fact was that the part of Nalin was acted by master Monindra Ghosh, a boy of 12 years. Since Girish Chandra's time Nalin has not been so artistically done as by this boy. Von Schlegel's representation was also considered by the audience as the nearest approach to the dramatist himself.

and a few famous actresses under the direction of the veteran actor Babu Kshetromohon Mitra a nephew and admirer of Girish Chandra proved to demonstration to what height histrionic art could reach, if a real drama was acted with true spirit. Much credit has been due to the directors of the Minerva Theatre specially to Mr. N. C. Gupta, the Chairman of the Board, but for whose hearty co-operation, Parishad could not have achieved what it did.

Through Mr. Gupta's full financial help and able guidance, Minerva Theatre is now a growing concern. In February of this year two talented artists Sm Ranibala & Sj Rathin Banerjee left Rangmahal and joined Minerva, and Sarajubala who lately joined became also the principal actress. The management then put on boards *Debdas* (dramatised by Sen Gupta from Babu Sarat Chaterjee's novel which had been first staged at Natya Bharati) on March 11, 1944, with the following cast :—

Basanta—Nirmal Lahiri, Debdas—Chhabi Biswas, Bhubon—Monoranjan Bhattacharjee, Chunilal—Ratin Baneıjee, Parbati—Sarajoo (original), Do mother—Neroda, Chandramukhi—Raneebala, Monoroma—Labonya, Jalada — Ferozo, Thandidi — Harimati.. N. B. Representation of Parboti was marvellous.

With the broadness of ideas of Mr. Gupta

and some of his colleagues, Minerva Theatre promises to continue in its position and has become very popular now.

Krishnadas's "Puroheet" was staged on the 24th May 44 and about the acting Amirta bazar Patrika says :—

"Nirmalendu Lahiri's rendering of the priest is magnificent. Ranibala in her comparatively small role was a delight to see. Rathin as the profligate son and Monoranjan as his indignant but weak father acted their parts well. Bandana's acting was fine."

Sachin Sen Gupta's *Rastrobiplap* is likely to be the next piece staged—

Minerva is inseperably associated with the name and contribution of Girish Chandra and we are very glad to see that it was saved from its critical position through the efforts and help of a great friend of us and we offer our hearty congratulations to Mr. Gupta and his colleagues and request them to uphold the traditions of the Bengali Stage on the lines of Girish Chandra and popularise his stirring dramas as much as possible.

CHAPTER IV

GIRISH AT THE CLASSIC THEATRE.

In the last volume we have spoken of the establishment of the Classic Theatre on the Board of the Emerald Stage and how Babu Amarendra Nath Dutta by dint of his merit and powers of organisation made it popular.

Indeed after the performances of Alibaba which fetched him money, he became a power in the theatrical world.

In February, 1898 when Beubonic plague broke out at Calcutta and people became restless,—Babu Lalit Maitra, a young zemindar of Rajshahi, with the help of some amateurs had formed a party under the name of "Marvel Theatre" and invited Girish to become their master. The party left for Rajshahi and showed some performances from July 2, 1898 under the direction of Girish Babu. As however, Maitra's property was soon after taken by the Court of Wards, the theatre was broken up and Girish returned to Calcutta.

Chuni Babu was at this time Assistant Manager of Amar Babu's Classic. No sooner Girish came to Calcutta from Rajshahi than both Amarendra Nath and Chuni Babu saw him and pressed him to be at their head. Girish Chandra out of affection for Amarendra joined the Classic on a nominal allowance. We have seen that before this also Girish while still at the Star, recast "Alibaba" and composed some songs for it.

After having appeared for some nights as Ram, Daksha, Clive, and for some nights as Jogesh in Profulla with Amarendra Nath as Bhajahari, Dani Babu as Suresh and Tincowri as Jnanada (for the first time July and August in this role), Girish after a few months left in December 1898. He was again secured as dramatic director on Rs. 300/- per month from March 1899, remodelled some scenes of "Bhramar" (the dramatised version of Bankim's Krishnakanter Will) and had a considerable share in the production of the drama which crowned Amar with success. The Baruni Tank and the Post Office scenes were added by Girish *.

* Cast of "Bhramar" :—

Haralal—Haribhuson Bhatt, Madhabinath—Chandi Ch. De, Nishakar—Dani Babu, Brhmanando—Purna Ghosh, Hare—Nripen Bose, Sona—Hiralal Chattejee, Bhramar—Kasum Kumari, Rohini—Promoda Sundari, Jamini—Bhuson Kumari.

As regards Amar Babu's truly realistic and hitherto unparalleled representation of Govinda Lal, we would refer our readers to the remarks of the Indian Mirror of the 20th September 1899, and affirm that it was as successful as it was popular. Bankim's Krishna Kanta too was vividly depicted by the veteran actor Mohendra Babu. It was marvellous and done to a finish.

The next attraction of Classic which ennobled the theatre and raised also position of Amarendra was Girish Chandra's "Pandova Gouraba" about which we have given some details in the last volume. "Pandova Gouraba" and its attraction, Girish Chandra's joining Minerva Theatre and performing "Sitaram" there, Amarendra Nath's contest and the farce of "Theatre", Girish's leaving Sarkar's services at the Minerva and Amarendra Nath's bringing him with due respect—have all been narrated before. Let us trace the incidents of the "Classic" after that.

In the meantime Amarendra Nath put on boards his opera "Duti Pran" on May 26, 1900, himself taking the part of Sundara and Kusum Kumari Malinee. This was followed by "Sonar Swapan" and the main attraction 'Theatre'. With these worthless pieces "Classic" began to lower itself in the estimation of real lovers of

art, but with Girish's advent now, it again revived its position. After his arrival three other celebrated artists also came to the Classic —Tarasundari, Dani Babu & Tincouri. But at the same time Classic lost a remarkable figure of the Bengali stage ; Babu Mohendra Lal Bose the great tragedian of Bengal died on the 8th March 1901. The part of Gangaram in Sitaram was his last performance.

The years 1901 & 1902 were the busiest and most prosperous years for the Classic when Girish's sevices for this theatre were fully utilised. On January 26, 1901 Girish's *Asrudhara* was staged with a good cast and was enjoyable both as a pathetic and entertaining comedy. *

On 20th April, 1901, Girish's *Moner Matan* also fetched good amount of money with the supporting cast :—

Mirjan—Dani Babu, Cowlaff—Amarendra, Taher—Nripen Bose, Meher—Akshoy Chakravorty, Fakeer—Aghore Pathok, King of Samarkand—Probodh Ch. Ghose, Kazi—Ateendra Bhattacharjee, Baneek—Chandi De, Golendam—Tarasundari, Delera—Kusumkumari, Sania—Gulphon Hari, Pareea—Rani moni,

* Bharatmata—Kusum Kumari, Bharata Santans —Amarendra Datta, Probodh Ghosh & Gosthobihari, Durbhiksha—Akshoy Chakravorty, Plague—Natobar Choudhury, Arajakata—Pandit Haribhuson.

Monia—Kironbala. Mr. Debkantha Bagchi was in charge of music. Nripenra Bose was Dancing master.

The Mohomedan Fakir is an embodiment of an ideal teacher···"Ram Krishna Deb".

The songs sung by Aghore Pathak as Fakeer in Hindi were excellent and Swami Vivekananda himself praised those very much.

Bankim Chandra's *Kapalkundala* which Girish had dramatised in 1873 was now revised by him and staged on June 1, 1901 with new scenes added and songs inserted and appreciation of the audience was daily on the increase.

Girish in five different roles—Adhikari, Chati-rakshak, Mātāl, Moote, Neighbour, and Dani Babu in the small role "Boy-servant" were superb and so was Amarendra Nath in the role of the hero who keeps up his former reputation in the interpretation of Nandakumar. Tarasundari truly represented Mati Bibi as depicted by Bankim Chandra and Aghore Pathok's (Kapalik) songs on Syāmā (Kali) were superb. Kusum Kumari too was excellent in the name-role.

The Classic stage became now an extremely reformed one. Hand-bills and announcements even ran in the following way :—

"Kapalkundala is a grand success. The very

atmosphere is a thrill with the glow of admiration and appreciation. *There was no pandering to low passions.*"

Grish then put *Mrinalini* on boards with himself as Pashupati with Tara as Monorama and Kusumkumari as Girijaya and though the play was very successful, Girish Chandra appeared for two nights only. As he got scars on the head owing to fire burning all round in the last scene, he did no longer appear in this part here which henceforth used to be done by Dani Babu. *Pashupati* was one of the most successful representations of Dani Babu also.

Girish's *Abhishap* was staged on September 28, 1901 and in 1902 *Santi* on June 9,"*Bhranti*" on July 19, *Aiyna* on December 25, all of which were successful.

The serenity of the atmosphere was, however interspersed by farces like Gupta Katha (staged on August 31, 1901) * but as these formed as after-pieces of serious dramas, Girish Chandra had to ignore the trifles.

* Referring to the editor of a paper "Navajug" against whom a defamation case started by editor of Amarendra's paper Rangalaya at first ended in conviction. Conviction was however quashed and a retrial ordered. The case ultimately ended in compromise and acquittal of Gupta.

'Santi' refers to the peace after the Boer-war and *Bhranti* again brought a new tide in the theatrical atmosphere. Rangalal the main character is the embodiment of service of humanity "Daridra Narayan" and because of the mission and the high principles which guide him, has no fear even of Moorsheed Kuli Khan the then Nawab of Bengal. Rangalal represents practically the Vivekananda Mission of which Girish was the real sponsor. It is a well-known fact that after his return from America, when Vivekananda was once absorbed in teaching Vedanta to the disciples—Girish suggested to him the idea of working for the poor, oppressed and hopeless ones. Vivekananda * Mission was the growth after this conversation. Bhranti represents the ideal and the part of Rangolal was acted to truth by Girish himself — The remaining cast was :—

Niranjan — Amarendra, Puranjan — Dani Babu, Udaynarayan—Aghore Pathok, Saligram—Hari Bhusan Babu, Murshid Kuli Khan—Natabar Choudhury, Sarfaraj Khan—Ateendra Bhattacharjee, Annada—Promoda Sundari, Madhuri—Bhuboneswari, Lalita—Rani moni, Gonga—Kusumkumari.

"Bangabashi" (1309, Bhadra 21) spoke of Bhranti as "the gem (Aoish Kanta Moni) of

* Vide Swami Sishya Samad page 94 by Sarat Chandra Chakravarty.

Dramas" and all papers including "Basumati" of Bhadra 26, 1309 also spoke in terms of highest praise about the same. "Bhranti" really produced a new wave of the spirit of service throughout the country. The youth of Bengal just before the Swadeshi Movement got a new inspiration from this drama acted on the stage.

"*Aiyna*" is a social farce referring to an old man who became mad after marriage of a young girl. It is distinguishable from *Biepagla Buro* in the sense that it is free from all vulgarity. The part of Sristidhar was to be performed by Amarendra, but when after the second night he fell ill, the dramatist himself (Girish Chandra) used to render the part and the piece became henceforth much more attractive.

1903 was a year of mixed fortunes for Amarendra Nath. He tried to compete with the successful representation of Star Theatre's Protapaditya, and took up the idea of managing both Classic and Minerva which now forebode loss and future misfortunes.

His rendering of the part of Raghubeer at Minerva has already been mentioned. He next gave a lease of the Minerva to Chuni Babu who staged Sansar and Murala in April—June 1904.

In the meantime *Satnam* by Girish Chandra was put on boards of the Classic. 'Satnam' is a highly national drama and the character of Vaishnabi is a true personification of a heroic woman who can bring independence to the country. Girish composed this drama when Tincourie in January 1903 was there and the part was meant for her. But the performance was put off for various reasons and when the drama was staged, she was not there.

The character of Aurangzeb has been drawn in an impartial way in this drama—determined, cautious—but without trust to any body. There has been nothing in this drama which could be said to bring about any feeling of discord between both the Hindus and Mohomedans. But some of the latter, misunderstanding the true spirit of the drama created such a row that further performance had to be suspended. This meant much loss to Amarendra Nath, and Classic suffered considerably.

Amarendra was in great trouble and we have described in page 22, how he was compelled to transfer the lease of Minerva to Mr. Panday and how he had to borrow Rs. 2500 from Girish Chandra.

On July 23, 1904 Raj Krishna Roy's "Tarani Sen Badh" was staged with Amarendra Nath as

Rama Kusum Kumari as Tarani. This was preceded by "Peyar".

In the meantime Chuni Babu raised the sales of Minerva with presents of books from Basumati and we have seen how Amarendra suffered great loss in the competition.

Added to this, Girish Chandra not being able to realise three months' salaries left Classic in November 1904, and joined the Minerva at the insistence of Chuni Babu. Then on the 27th November 1904 Amarendra staged Rabindra Nath's "Chokher Bali" and the cast was distributed as follow :

Mohendra — Amarendra, Behari — Monomohan Goswmi, Binodini—Kusum, Asha — (Blackie), Annapurna Jagattarini, Raj Lakshi—Panna Rani.

Amarendra Nath's troubles multiplied and at last decrees in two suits at the High Court crippled him much—one was by Belchamber &c. for arrears of rent and ejectment and another by a creditor Purno Chandra Chakravorty. The result was that Babu Atul Chandra Roy and Purno Babu were made receivers on 3rd April 1905, but the rule for ejectment was discharged.

Amarendra Nath left the Classic Theatre—his own house.

Before he left, Amarendra got a friend and supporter in Babu Chuni Lall Deb. Our readers ought to remember how owing to some difference with Pandey, Chuni Babu left his own theatre—the reconstructed Minerva. Adversity brought both friends to the same level now. On 18th February 1905 Chuni Babu appeared as Mr. Moor and Amarendra as Preonath in 'Sansar.' On the 4th March Chuni Babu appeared as Harish and Amarendra as Aghore, in 'Haranidhi' at the Classic.

In April 1905 Amarendra's last appearance as proprietor of the classic was in the role of Hariraj.

Amarendra Nath and Chuni Lall then opened the Grand Theatre at the Alfred stage (afterwards Natya-Bharati), the lease of the house being taken in the name of Chuni Babu from Radha Kissan Mati Lall.

Prithwiraj a drama by Monomohan Goswami was staged at Grand on May 6, 1905, Amarendra being in the leading role supported by Chuni Babu as Joychand, author as Jodhmal, Nikhil Babu as Bakhtier, Nripen Bose as Chand Kabi, Ahindra De as Surjamal and Kusumkumari as Sanjukta. This was followed by a social farce *Ghughoo* staged on 20th May, 1905.

Inspite of presents of books, sales however did not exceed Rs. 250 a night. Minerva became then very popular with the masterful tragedy *Balidan* and the Star had also risen much in public estimation. Amarendra could not now cope with these rival theatres.

Bapparao was staged on July 29 and 'Banger Angached' on the partition day on the 16th October 1905. 'Devi Choudhurani' and a few old pieces were staged and at last Amarendra at the insistence of the Receiver Atul Roy accepted service under him at the Classic on Rs. 500/- a month. From a prince to a pauper, from master to a servant in his own house !—He re opened classic with Prithiraj on 21st October 1905 and also staged small farces—Holoki (4th Nov), Love or poison on 23rd December and 'Welcome to Prince' on December 25, 1905. The Bandemataram song of Holoki, was very thrilling.

In 1906, he tried to recover position with Girish Chandra's Serajuddoula the success of which at the Minerva was in the lips of every body. Dani Babu used to come to the Classic theatre now and again to help in the rehearsals. Amarendra staged it on January 27, 1906 *, but sales were not at all satisfactory. His health broke down and inspite of attempts he could

not make any head way. Differences arose with Atul Roy and he left in May 1906, and with him the Classic Theatre was closed for good.

* Seraj—Amarendra, Karimchacha—Hari Bhusan, Dansha—Nripen Bose, Clive—Monmohon Goswami, Jahara—Kusum, Ghaseti—Blackie, Alibordi Begam—Panna Rani, Lutfunnessa—Binodini (Handi), Mohan Lall—Hira Lall Chatterjee.

Next he made another attempt and opened the "New Classic" on the Grand Stage with Bankim Chandra's 'Beeshbriksha' which was named "Kunda" for the stage with himself as Nagendra, Purna Ghose Debendra, Kusum Suryamukhi, Puntoorani Kamal Moni and Blackie as Kundo. He however fell ill and the New Classic too was stopped. "Swernahar" of Harro Nath Bose staged on November 10, 1906 in his absence was its last performance. Crest fallen his condition may now be described in his own words * :—

"Lying in a ruined house
And with a shattered health.
Here do I lie down
Awaiting the sleep eternal".

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* His poem—"Rogosajya"—vide Natya Mondir Magh 1318.

CHAPTER V.

THE KOHINOOR THEATRE.

In 1907, the Emerald Stage on which the Classic Theatre was showing performances for about ten years was sold at the sheriff's sale on April and Kabu Sarat Kumar Roy B. A. a wealthy contractor and son of Babu Prosanna Kumar Roy M. A. Vakil High Court and a Zaminder, Curalgacha, Nadia purchased it at one lac and eight thousand rupees. He intended to have an ideal theatre and began therefore to recruit good artists for the same. Babus Aparesh Chandra Mukerjee, Monomotho Nath Pal and Kshetro Mohan Mitra were already there and Babu Kshirode Prosad Vidyabenode's *Chandbibi* was selected for performance.

The house was repaired in an up-to-date fashon and Babu Dharmadas Sur was left in charge of the stage management. The well-known music party of Prof : Dakshina Charan Sen was also secured.

There was a talk of bringing Natyacharya Amrita Lall Bose, but through the insistence of Sarat Babu's father and Kshetro Babu. who spared no pains to assist Sarat Babu in his project Girish Chandra's services as manager of the theatre were secured on an offer of Rs. 500/- per month as salary with a bonus of Rs. 10,000/- Rs. 5,000/ cash and Rs.5,000/- with a post-dated cheque. Tincorie, Tara Sundari, Dani Babu, Nilmadhob Babu, Purna Babu and others were also appointed as artists.

The last Act of Chand Bibi was finished by Girish himself and he made other necessary changes with Herculean labour. He was next able to have it staged on 11th August 1907, the Bhadra month which would fall within next four days, being considered inauspicious. Rehearsals were controlled by him fully.

On the first night the rush was great and sales amounted to Rs. 2,600/-and would have been double, had not the accomodation been considered insufficient. No performance before this in stage-history commanded so large a sale.

The performance was highly successful-- parts of Tincorie, Tara, Khetro Babu being rather of an exceptional nature. They appeared respectively as Joshi Bai, Chand Bibi and

Ibrahim with Dani Babu as Adil Shah, Handu Babu Raghuji and Aparesh Babu as *Mallaji.*

Kshetro Babu's "Prem Saje Ki Rano Saje" reminded one, as the Bangabashi remarked, of the well-known expression of Garrick Lear.

"Pray, you, undo the buttom"

After this, Chatrapati Sivaji, Serajuddoula, Mirkassim, Durgesh Nandini and other dramas, were also staged drawing large crowds and huge were the earnings of Kohinoor.

Kohinoor thus promised to be the best theatre of this time and Girish now with a view to write a drama on Napolean Bonaparte began to read all books and literature relating to the great conquerer and his sitting room (used both a room for study as well as receiving visitors) became now full of the books on the subject. He also composed the well-known social drama "Grihalaksmi" here.

But though Kohinoor rose at it should, fates were against it. Babu Girish Chandra Ghosh began to get Asthmatic fits and when the disease overpowered him, he could not even talk with anybody. Added to this, the greatest calamity befell the Kohinoor Theatre when

Sarat Babu the life and soul of the theatre became seriously ill and even change could not do him any good. He was brought back to Calcutta. On the 22nd December, 1907 when "Dado O Didi" an operatic farce was put on boards with and as an after-piece of the ever green drama *Mirkasim* and the house a packed up one—many returning disappointed, the leading actors suggested that Sarat Bubu should be brought in a stretcher to observe in his last days at least, the excitement of the audience for Kohinoor plays, but it was not possible for him even to rise from bed. At last all was over with him on the 31st December 1907.

In January 1908, Sarat Babu's brother Sisir Babu took up the helm and that put everything topsy-turvy. Sarat Babu was an extremely amiable person and treated the artists with great consideration, but everything was changed now. Sisir Babu with an illiberal policy could not bear Girish Chandra and began to treat him with indifference. Even Grihalaksmi (manuscript of which was read) had no appreciation from him. While Sarat Babu used to treat Girish Babu with the greatest possible humility, Sisir stopped Girish Chandra's salary, because the latter could not regularly come to the theatre owing to his serious *ill*ness. Girish had no

alternative but to sue for the balance of bonus-money and unpaid salaries. Mr. Justice Fletcher considered the evidence of Girish Chandra as absolutely trustworthy and granted him the decree sought for.

The schism brought about by the short-sighted policy of Sisir Roy made Kohinoor's position very weak. No doubt Ardhendu Sekhar was brought in, but the history of Minerva (1896) was repeated. Baruna of Kshirode Prosad (staged on 7th March), Mohila Majlish (Durga das De) staged on 17th October and Doulate Dunia (Kshirode) on 21st November had little attraction and *Guru Gobinda Singh* of Hara Nath Bose staged on December 18, 1908 brought rather a disaster. The house was crowded and, when an actress in the role of Thakur Sing's mother in the fourth act thus said—"I am mother not only of Thakur Sing, but the mother of the whole of the Punch—Ab, nay of the whole Sikh community," some of the Sikhs could not forget that the speaker was none but a woman of low origin and began to create a row, shouting—"how can a Kasbi be our mother !" The play had to be discontinued and even personal representations to the Sikh Head office (old Patna) by Aparesh Babu and Hara Nath Bose produced no effect. When

next the drama was changed into 'Beerpuja' Gurugobinda being turned into a Marathi hero, and staged in the next month (January 30, 1909), it had little attraction.

The next pieces in 1909 *Mayoor Sinhasan* staged on 8th May, Pratifal on 3rd July, Nera Haridas, Sonar Sansar on 21st August were also worthless, but Haripada Mukherjee's *Durgabati* staged on Dec. 25, 1909 fetched much money. Khetro Babu's Baj Bahadoor was another brilliant feat and so was Handu Babu's Jagannath. Promada did well as Durgabati and was supported by Bhuson Kumari (jr) as Mati Bibi and Charubala as Rupamoti.

The position was tottering for the next eighteen months and the last brilliancy of the flickering lamp, before it died out, was only perceived when Babu Haripada Sanyal's *Biswamitra* was put on boards on the 26th August 1911. For some months Girish Chandra's 'Tapobal' was in the air and he was astonished to find some similarity between his drama then in preparation and the present Biswamitra. He therefore, changed his fifth act into a marvellous one.

This piece was well-represented and the part of Babu Aparesh Chandra Mukherjee as Bashis-

tha was really true to character. The other parts were taken as follows :—

Biswamitra—Mr. Tarak Palit, Indra—Kali Prosanna Das, Satadrumi—Kusum Kumari, Akshomala—Promada Sundari, Vedamata—Nagendra Bala (Bunchi), Arundhati—Binodini (Handi).

Zenobia was performed on the 25th November * and Kusum Kumari as queen did well.

The last attraction was *Khanjahan* by Kshirode Prosad staged on the 29th June 1912, when Aparesh Babu was in the name role. Palit appeared as Dadaji, Promoda as Sophia and Khetro Babu appeared as Narain as he was then not in the Star Theatre and prepared the part in one day's rehearsal.

The last stage came at last when the theatre could not run, the state was in debt and at last the Kohinoor stage with its site was sold on auction on the 29th July 1912. Kohinoor is gone but all credit goes to Sarat Babu whose early death put a stop to all his projects.

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* In November the well-known Shakespearean actor Mr. Allan Wilkie came with his party to Calcutta and performed *Macbet* on the 5th November and Othello on the 11th November 1911, on this stage.

CHAPTER VI

MONOMOHAN THEATRE.

Monomohan Theatre at 68, Beadon Street, was the most popular theatre of Calcutta during the years 1915-1924. The house which adorned it was built first as the Star Theatre in 1883 with Gurmukh Roy as the proprietor where Girish's dramas Daksha, Buddha, Chaitanya Lila and Bilwamangal had been staged. The Star Theatre was removed to Hatibagan (the present-house) and Emarald of Gopal Seal continued from 1888-1896. The City Theatre played for a few months. Then the Classic theatre flourished here for about six or seven years. Then the Kohinoor Stage opening with Chand Bibi showed performances and came to a close in 1911. In 1912, the theatre became the property of Babu Monomohan Pandey who purchased it at Sheriff's sale on rupees one lac and eleven thousand, on July 29.

Monomohan Babu was also the proprietor of the Minerva Theatre for 2/3rd share. He was continuing the theatre there, but owing to litigations as stated in page 91, Monomohan

Babu brought the whole party of Minerva and staged Girish Chandra's *Kalapahar* on the 7th August 1915. No sooner Upendra Babu came to know of this, than he moved the High Court which restrained Monomohan Babu from using the name Minerva at this stage. He therefore, named the Theatre after his name and within a few years made the theatre very lucrative. The most important figure however who mainly contributed to his fabulous income was Dani Babu, the greatest actor of the time. His contemporary Mr. Amarendra Nath Dutt was then declining in health and powers and his end also was drawing nigh. Thus in Bengali Stage Dani Babu was at that time "Ekaschandra"—the one moon in the sky.

The following pieces staged on the Monomohan Stage after Kalapahar are worth-mentioning :—

(1) *Kanthahar*—1915—September 25.

Dani Babu used to take the part of the robber Ranolal, Hira Lall Chatterjee of Narendra, Mr. N. Banerjee of Nobin Krishna, Murari Ahindra De, Satyendra—Inspector, Mohini—Basanta Kumari (of Star), Soroj—Sashimukhi, Syama—Niharbala.

Inspite of the fact that the piece is based on a detective story, the performance was good.

(2) *Badshah Zadi*—by Khirode prosad Vidyavinode staged on December 11, 1915.

The cast was as follows :—

Aziz—Dani Babu, Hamida—Tincorie, (She was last at Thespian Temple appearing as Jodhbai in "Nurmahal"), Jobela—Basanta, Mahmud—Chuni Lall Deb, [from Star], Almin—Mr. N. Banerjee.

The above artists having great reputation, this play too gave much money to Mr. Pandey.

Bappa Rao was staged (Feb. 26, 1916) with Dani Babu in the leading role and Tincorie as Lachchmia, followed by *Kabeer* of Haranath Bose with Dani Babu as Kabeer and Tincorie as Sannyashini on April 8, 1916.

The next piece which gave enough money to the proprietor was "*Mogul Pathan*" showing exploits and heroism of Emperor Shershah who defeated Humayoon in 1540, with the following cast from July 8, 1916 :—

Shersha—Dani Babu, Humayoon—Chuni Babu, Chand—Basanta, Sophia—Sashimukhi.

Dani Babu's representation was marvellous to a degree.

"*Panipath*" (Oct. 6, 1917). with Dani Babu as Babar, Chuni Babu as Sangram Singh, Kusum Kumari as Karna Devi and Ascharyamoyi as Delera was passable.

The above pieces were no doubt worthless, but that did not affect the financial position in the least.

Debala Devi was a little better but the drama was acted with marvellous dexerity on August 17, 1918. Tho different poses and movements along with vocal changes were extraordinary with Dani Babu as Khijir Khan. The supporting cast was as follows :—

Matia—Ascharjamoyi, Alauddin—Chuni Lall Deb, Kafoor—Hiralal Chatterjee, Kamala—Sonamonee, Maharastra Mother—Haipriya.

The play ran for a considerable number of nights and the part of Matia also was ably rendered.

"*Hindu Beer*" (staged on Jan. 10, 1920) was of the description of the dramas mentioned before. All the same there was no dearth of sales. Babu Kshetro Mohan Mitra joined by this time and his representation of Mubareej was praise-worthy. Ascharya's Meher was acted very well.

Besides the above pieces which still did not fail to draw crowded houses, Chandra Gupta, Prafulla, Grihalaksmi, Balidan and other old pieces specially the first where Dani Babu was in the role of Chanakya used to fetch much money and Monomohan Babu made very large

profits. Dani Babu also used to get a share of profits which by degrees rose to half and Monomohan Theatre became a very profitable concern to both.

But dramas were worthless and art began to be deteriorated. The old actors becamemonotonous and people generally felt an eagerness for the new. Dani Babu was alone in the field and appeared sterio-typed. To make more attractive, Bioscopic pictures formed part of plays for some time. Peoples' tastes also became a bit deteriorated and the combined performance of stage and film became the peculiarity of the day.

About this time arose a new luminary on the horizon. Babu Sishir Kumar Bhaduri, an M. A. of the Calcutta University and a popular professor of the Vidyasagar College had already made a great mark in the role of Chanakya in the University Institute where the cream of society and best products of the University used to take interest. The success in the role of Chanakya spread his reputation amongst the people, specially the student community, and when he joined the professional stage in 1921, his appearance created a great sensation. Besides, the part of Alamgeer was

also rendered by him in a very artistic and interesting way.

The year 1921 was the upheaval of the national spirit in India and although dramas like Sirajuddoula and Mirkassim, Palasheer Pryaschitta or Rana Protap, Nanda Kumar or Mewar Patan were sadly wanting, Babu Nishikanta Basu Roy's "*Bange Bargi*" made some though poor consolation. The drama was acted well and Dani Babu was at his best. The following was the cast (Feb. 10, 1922) :—

Bhaskar Pandit—Dani Babu, Mohan Lal—Babu Kshetro Mohan Mitra, Madhuri — Sashi Mukhi, Gouri—Ascharjamoyee, Alibardi—Hiralal Chatterjee, Seraj—Ranee Sundari, Meerkhan—Purna Ghose, Upananda—Jivon Pal, Chhidam—Aheendra De.

Some of the words as "Sanhar, Sanhar" (destruction) were culled after Mirkasim according to Dani Babu's choice and he made a powerful effect on the audience with his appearance, voice and expressions. But this was the last in Mr. Pandey's Monomohan and the next pieces "Alexender" and "Lalitaditya" staged on 18th August, 1923, in February 2, 1924 respectively added nothing to Dani Babu's glory. Although the dream-scene of the hero was most artistically done by Dani Babu in the latter drama, people became now restless for a

new set of players. The comparison was now drawn by a section of journalists in a prejudiced manner and Dani Babu began to lose in reputation. Right-minded journalists however failed not to express gratification at the general acting, and the Amrita Bazar Patrika thus observes—

"Kusum appeared to be a real Ranee. Ratta and Chameli give us much fine acting. Babu Surendra Nath Ghose appeared in the title role and did his best in a part which was Mark Antony and Macbeth all rolled into one. But above all towered head and shoulders the character of Bhupal Sen as rendered by Khetro Mohon Mitter—Setting and make-up good and whole was completely a success."

Mr. Pandey now thought of closing the theatre. He understood that the new tide that was fast approaching would be too strong for him with his old party to cope with. Besides he had definite information that the theatre would fall on the Central Avenue Extension that was the prospective scheme of the Calcutta Improvement Trust and thought it would be no good to continue further. A life of rest would also be necessary. He thus disabanded his party and intended to lease it out to Mr. Sisir Bhaduri who was then showing some

performances at the Alfred Stage. Dani Babu's career was thus set back for a while.

Mr. Bhaduri staged *Sita* * on August 6, 1924, *Pashani, Jana*, Pundareek and some old pieces and then removed to Cornwallis Theatre, under the name "Natya Mandir" and opened *Bisharjan* on June 26, 1926.

In 1927, The Art Theatre limited which was showing performances at the stage of the Star theatre extended their activities in Monomohan Theatre also, taking lease of it. Mr. Aparesh Chandra Mukherjee's *Ramayan* was staged on July 1, 1927 and Mr. Monmotha Nath Roy's *Chand Saudagar* on September 14, 1927, Mr. Aheendra Choudhury taking the parts of Dasharath and Chand Soudagar, Durgadas Banerjee of Ram & Lakhindra and Susilabala as Sita and Behula, Susila Sundari as Kaikeyi.

In 1928, Monomohan Theatre was leased to Babus Anadi Bose of the Aurora Theatres (Film) and Probodh Chandra Guha (late Secretary Art Theatre Ltd.) who re-opened Monomohan Theatre with *Meera Bai* by Monmotha Roy, on the 11th August 1928. Both Messrs. Bose and Guha are practical men of business. They not only engaged amongst others Babu Nirmalendu Lahiri, Saraju Bala Prokasmoni and Subashini

* Description will be given elsewhere.

(songstress) but also promptly secured the services of Dani Babu as manager and Director. Our readers need be reminded that Dani Babu showed his performances marvelłously in the Art Theatre Limited from 1924, in the teeth of great rivalry with the Natya Mandir Party where in all instances with a co-operating directorate he was maintaining his old reputation remarkably.

Mirabai was followed by Sachindra Nath's *Rakta Kamal* with Nirmalendu as Dada Mahasoy and Saraju as Mamata and by Jaladhar's *Praner Dabi* with Nirmal as Keshab, Rabi Roy as Sasanka and Saraju as Achala.

Here at Monomohan Dani Babu had once felt himself humiliated by his exit with the entry of Shisir Kumar Bhaduri but now he found an opportunity to tower his head over all in open competition.

While at Monomohan he appeared as Shiva in 'Dakshajajna' Bhaskar Pandit, Jogesh, Chanakya, Shersha, Nagendra etc. and when the rehearsal of "Pather Sheshe" a social tragedy by Nishi Kanta Basu Roy was going on, Dani Babu was requested to play the part of Jogesh in *Profulla* with Shisir Bhaduri as Ramesh at Natya Mandir. By that time Shisir Babu had reached the zenith of his success, and

Dani Babu was fast failing in health. The occasion was a solemn one; it was to raise money for the statue of Girish Chandra Ghose and Dani Babu took all precautions to keep his voice * in tact. The house was full to its highest capacity with audience eagerly expectant, but step by step Dani Babu rose to such a climax that he carried off the palm of the day. The old again rose up and won the laurels. This was on October 3, 1928.

Then came the performance of *Pathersheshe* Dec 15, 1928 with Nirmolendu Lahiri, another product of the New School and Sarajubala in the roles of Nalin and Parul. This pair acted very well, true to the tragic vein, too unbearable for many to witness and Dani Babu too acted to such a finish that to see him in that role next was a treat to every body. The other parts † too were well done—specially of Sukbada and Anadi—

Dani Babu and Shisir Babu also appeared together in Shajahan and Profulla in 1929 in this

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* It is said for three days he did not talk with any body.

† Jogesh—Moni Ghosh, Sukboda—Prokashmoni Radharani—Subashni, Anadi—Satyen De, Lalita—Nirupama, Syama—Kumar Mitra, Govind—Satis Chatterjee.

very stage. On one occasion happened some amusing conversations on the stage which created great interest in the audience. All this was before Bhaduri left for America. On the previous day when Shajahan was being acted, in Durbar scene of Act II, Mr. Bhaduri as Shajaban suddenly appeared on the stage, though not required by his cue and addressed Dani Babu thus "Bachcha (son) you have withered much." (Bachcha, bara roga hoe giechho). Every body was astonished at this uncalled for intervention of the dramatist by an actor.

On the next day Mr. Bhaduri as Ramesh thus addressed to Bhajahari as represented by Mr. Nirmalendu Lahiri—

"Bah Chhokra, mamar ta Khoye Besh nadhoosh nadoosh chehara Korecho to"—you have become well-nourished living on mama's.

Mr. Lahiri kept silent, but was once roused to say "Dutakai Mulluk chand hote parina, Sisir Bhaduri paryanta hote pari.

Then when Mr. Bhaduri was counting coins to give to Lahiri the latter said "Ekta bhalo mad, ei dhara du taka."

Bhaduri immediately interveing said "Chhokra, wine can not be had at Rs. 2/- now."

Lahiri—Ta Dada Mader Katha tomi Jemonti Jano, * ar keo ta Janena.

Bhaduri was delaying to hand over the money, but when he actually handed over the coins and Bhajaharl was leaving the stage, Bhaduri shouted—" Chhokra, taka Koita kintu Gera deona"

Nirmal (Bhajahari)— we are not, dada, so educated to do this.

The above conversation, laughable as it is, created however a gulf between the two artists of merit and we doubt if and when after that, there was any reconciliation between them.

To come back to Monomohon's own performance, Barada Das Gupta's *Karmabeer* with Nirmalendu as Charak and Rabi Roy as Abhimanyoo was staged on 30th April 1929 and *Samudra Cupta* (Sudhir Raha) on October 25, with Lahiri in the main role. Next on 25th December 1929 Babu Moni Lal Banerjee's *Jahangeer* was staged with Dani Babu in the main role and Sashimukhi as Noorjahan with Nirmolendu Lahiri as Shajahan, Durgadas Banerjee as Mahabat Khan and Sarajubala as Monija, Indubala as Hushiar and Ushabati (Patal) as Momtaz.

"*Mahua*" (Monmotho Roy's opera) was

* Mr. Bhaduri's habits on the stage were really unsteady at the time.

staged on the 31st December 1929 with Nirmalendu Lahiri as Humra Sardar, Durgadas Banerjee as Nader Chand, Prabhat Singh as Sujan, Saraju as Mohua, Indubala as Radhu, and Moni Ghosh as Gobindolal.

On the Rathajatra day July 13, 1930 *Gairik Pataka* (Sachin Sen) was successfully staged with Nirmalendu Lahiri as Sivaji, Radhikanund Babu as Aurangzeb Susila Sundari as Jeezabai and Saraju as Syamoli.

Rabindra Nath's *Mukteer Upay* was staged in May 1930 with Radhika Babu as Fakeer, Nihar as Hansabati and Saraju as Haimabali. *In 1930 Gopikaramon Krishna* an amusing farce, was staged during Janmastomi and was followed by *Meghanathaa* worthless book in which Radhikananda Babu took the part of Girindramohan.

Manmatha Roy's *Karagar* was the last piece staged here on Dec. 24, 1930 with Dani Babu as Basudev Nirmal Babu as Kangsha, Bhumen Roy as Kankan, Neehar as Chandana, Susila Pundari as Debaki. Moni Ghosh as Narak and Sefalika as Mondira.

After this the Manomohan Theatre was closed, the party coming to Natya Niketan. The house was then demolished and the readers will not now be able to see any trace of it, the place forming part the Chittaranjan Avenue.

CHAPTER VII

THE BENGAL-PAVILION

[*At 9/3 Beadon Street*]

After the Bengal Theatre was closed on April 24, 1901, with the death of Babu Behari Lal Chatterjee, Babu Guruprosad Maitra with the help of Babu Nilmadhab Chakraborty of City Theatre fame started the Aurora Theatre here and staged "Dakshina" a drama by Kshirode Prasad Vidyabinode on the 17th August 1901. Next were revived Bankim Chandra's 'Devi Chowdhurani' with Mr. Chakrabarty in his favourite role of Bhabani Pathok as also "Bellik Bazar."

After Sadhana, Sarasundari, Pasusason and one or two pieces of Atul Krishna Mitra were staged, Mr. Chakravarty put two plays on boards which were attended with great success, specially the second piece "*Rezia*" by Manomohan Roy in which the character of the queen was so marvellously done by Miss Tarasundari that her name became practically synonymous with the character she played. Indeed the representation of the queen used to be so

masterly and artistic that in the opinion of a large number of England-returned persons including Messrs. C. R. Das (Deshbandhu) and Bepin Chandra Pal, Tarasundari was in no way inferior, if not superior to Sara Bernardt or the Divine Sara.

The first piece "*Kal Parinoy*" by Ramlal Banerjee was staged on March 15, 1902 with Mr. Chakravarty as Jagadish, Preanath Ghosh as Manindra, Akshoy Chakravarty as Sambhoo, Harimati as Kishori and Bishad Kusum as Kalee Jhee and *Rezia* followed it on 17th May 1902 with Tarasundari, as we said before, in the name role, Probadh Ghosh as Baktier, Harimoti (Blackie) as Indira and Mr. Ardhendu Mustafi as executioner.

Bankim Chandra's *Radharani* dramatised by Atul Mitra was staged on August 23, 1902 and Manikarnikar Ghat, Beneras and the Rathkhola at Mahesh were very vividly shown. Tarasundari was in the role of Radharani, and also as Dalal Balok in *Ekadas Brihaspati*, and *Sohag* in *Paritosh* (Ramlal Banerjee).

Then the lessee became Babu Giri Mohan Mullick who opened in this stage the Unique Theatre with Mr. S. C. Chatterjee as Manager.

"*Ratnamala*" by Mr. Chatterjee was opened on June 21, 1903 with Tarasundari as Mandar-

mala and Sushilabala as Ratnamala. After staging "Swashan" or the 'Fall of Mewar' on Sept. 16, 1903 Mr. Chatterjee with the help and money of Ram Patra a rice merchant left Giri Mullick and joined the latter winning the co-operation of the whole body of artists. Babu Kshetro Mohan Mitra a budding artist and well-known here-after as a man possessed of strong powers of organisation took up the cause of Mr. Mullick, secured the co-operation of Dani Babu and Chuni Babu and won back all the artists over again. This party as re-organised now staged Mr. D.L. Roy's *Tarabai* successfully with the supporting cast on Nov. 14, 1903 :—

Tarasundari—Tara Bai, Dani Babu—Prithwiraj, Chuni Babu—Surjamal, Khetro Babu—Joymal, Mr. Palit Raimal, Montu Babu—Rana Sanga, Kartic Babu—Sultan, Sudhirabala—Sultana, Ranu Babu—Probhu Rao, Prokasmoni—Tamasha.

Prokasmoni rendered her part excellently and Dani Babu too did very well. His acting when he took sweets mixed with poison given by Probhu Rao was superb. Tarasundari also did well, but Unique was not heard of after this.

The next few years of the Bengal Stage were practically controlled by Chuni Babu, though for a very short time only Amar Babu was here with his Great National.

As we have seen, after some performances at the Grand Theatre (Prithwiraj Ghooghoo, Bapparao, Bengal-Partition) Chuni Babu came to the National which had been opened with *Adrista* of Ramlal Banerjee on December 2, in 1905. Mr. B. L. Datta was the Manager and Chuni Babu was appointed as master on a monthly salary of Rs. 150/-. The most noteworthy drama staged here was that of *Banga Vikram*, showing the exploits of Kedar Roy. This play staged on 14th July 1906, in as much it was imbued with a spirit of nationalism, met with an appreciation. It was just within a month of Minerva's 'Mirkassim' and two weeks before Star Theatre's "Palashir Prayaschitta."

Chuni Babu acted well and so did Chandi De in the role of Chand Roy. Ranu Babu's part as Srimanta was unapproachable. Tara Sundari joined National from Minerva and from the 4th August 1906, began to appear as Anita where as usual she was at her best. The part of Sonamoni used to be acted by Promoda of Rani Durgabati fame of the coming Kohinoor. Probodh Ghose's Isha Khan used also to be very good.

After Tarasundari came, National Theatre staged also Rezia and Sansar with herself as

Razia and Bama, but she left in July 1907 for the Kohinoor Theatre. There was some misunderstanding between her and the Manager Behari Dutta and a case was instituted by Tara Sundari under Section 504. I P.C. (intentional insult), but happily the case ended in compromise through the efforts of Girish Chandra.

The other peices in 1907 deserve not much mention except *Chhatrapati Sivaji* which was staged on the 21st September.

In 1908, other pieces need no mention but in "*Kalyani*" by Haripada Chatterjee, Chuni Babu as Sontal Sirdar was at his best again. This is another piece, Kapaleek being another, where Chuni Babu stood supreme.

Towards the end of 1908 Tincourie joined the National and for the first time appeared as Vaishnabi in *Satnam* on the 1st May 1909, which was originally meant for her, as with her appearance and voice she admirably suited the part. If Satnam could be staged with Girish as Fakir Ram, Mr. Mustafi as Charan Das, Amarendra as Ranendra, Kusum Kumari as Gulshana, Dani Babu as Aurangzeb and Tincorie as Vaishnabi, Bengali audience would have enjoyed a rare treat. After the suspension of *Satnam* in the Classic, Chuni Babu had the

drama performed under the name "Bharat Gourab"—Glory of India, here.

In 1910. owing to some difference with Manager B. L. Dutta, Chuni Babu, Pandit Abinash and Sorojini left the National. And soon after, the theatre was closed.

We have said how Amarendra was the lessee in 1911 here and in his "Great National" new pieces Jivane Morane, Bajirao were staged.

Amarendra soon after left it for the Star, and Chuni Babu came here now as the lessee. The last Great National showed performances here was on the 6th November 1911 when Balidan and Bilwa Mangal were staged with Amarendra in the leading roles.

After Chuni Babu came, his part of Magistrate in *Rajlakshmi*, staged on the 9th December 1911 was again a success, although the sales were not satisfactory. The part Nikhilendra Babu took met with appreciation when at the death scene he regained consciousness and memory.

The other characters were :—

Pandit Abinash—Gopal, Khagendra Nath Sarkar—Debkantha, Kali Charan Banerjee—Govinda, Amritalal Dutt—Dukhiram, Sorojini Dasi—Matangini, Lilabati—Rajlaxmi, Hari Priya—Lilabati.

Jaydeb (staged on Sept 14, 1912) was the next attraction. Although the prices of admission were reduced to half and Chuni Babu's Theatre was not very well-spoken of, we may, however, speak with confidence that as Jaydeb Chuni Babu generated a feeling of devotion in the part, rare in others, and the drama as a whole was very well acted, The brilliant cast was follows :—

Jaydeb—Chuni Babu, Niranjan—Handu Babu, Parashar—Pandit Abinash, Raja—Nikhil Deb, Raj Guru — Gostha Chakravarty, Krishna — Lilabati, Digambar—Nripen Bose, Bemola—Sorojini, Padma—Harimati, Aruna—Kusumkumari.

All the parts seemed to us to have been well rendered. This was followed by Bheesma on April 30, 1913 and in September *Vikharini* a dramatic piece by Amala Devi (Desha Bandhu C. R. Dass's sister) was acted, Purna Ghosh taking the role of Magistrate, Harimati as Vikharini and Handu Babu as Madhab.

"Nabab-nandini" and *Brahmatej* were not received well.

Chuni Babu was loved by his compeers. In a performance of "Profulla" (1914) for the benefit of Chuni Babu, Babu Amrita Bose appeared as Ramesh, Dani Babu Jogesh and Amar Babu as Bhajahari,

But with all, Chuni Babu could not continue and at last Grand National was stopped for good and Chuni Babu now accepted service under Amar Babu at the Star Theatre.

In 1915 Thespian Temple at the Bengal Stage was started by Babu Kshetro Mitra who staged Noormahal (Harisadhan Mukherjee) on August 7, 1915. Tincorie played the part of Jodhabai and Kshetro Babu that of Selim, Panna in that of Noormahal, and Bhushan Kumari as Rukmā. After reviving Jana, 'Raja Rani.' They also staged Rama (East Lynle) and Hamir shortly after, with Khetro Babu as Jal Mehta and Jogesh Choudhury * as Senapati. Tincorie did not stay long, and was followed by Panna after which the theatre began to close down. Kshetro Babu's lease was for a very short time, but even to his last day he was not idle.

Presidency Theatre was here for a short time after that. The Bengal Theatre stage was built in 1873, but it is not in existence now. The Beadon Street Post office is there.

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* This was the beginning of Jogesh Babu's career.

CHAPTER VIII

STAR THEATRE.

After Girish Chandra left the Star Theatre, (vide page 147 Vol. III) the note-worthy piece acted there was Pandit Nritya Gopal Kabiraje's *Harish Chandra* on September 10, 1898 (re-cast by Amrita Lal Bose). Babu Amrita Mitra and Tara Sundari as Harish Chandra and Saibya infused such extreme pathos into the performance that the play with the pair and Mr. Bose as Viswamitra, Akshoy Koer as Vidushaka, Upendra Mitra as Batook, Ghanasyam De and Jivan Sen as Parahu and Jhiman was a highly successful play at the Star.

On the 23rd September 1899, Amrita Bose's *Sabash Athash* or "Bravo Twenty eight" was staged, eulogising the twenty eight councillors of the Calcutta Corporation who had resigned their seats in protest of the Calcutta Municipal Bill of 1899 called the Mackenzie Bill that proposed to confer all the powers of the Corporation upon 12 councillors (then called commissioners) consisting of four elected Indians, four nominated members and four Europeans.

The next piece was a racy farce named "*Viraha*" by D. L. Roy staged on November 4, 1899. In that play Kashi Babu as Govinda was highly entertaining for his comic songs. But the Star was fading day by day and the financial condition became anything but satisfactory. At such a time Pandit Khirode Prosad Bidyabinode of Alibaba fame and afterwards a famous dramatist was introduced to the Proprietors by Babu Akshoy Kali Koer. A few pieces of Khirode Prosad were put on the stage, *Saptama* Protima or Avon's All for Love—on the 19th July, *Sabitri* on the 4th October and Bedoura (an adaptation from Arabian Night's) on the 25th December 1902. These did not prove successful but the historical drama under the name of *Protapaditya* suited the time. Babu Amrita Lal Mitra suggested some novel improvements—for example Bijoya's character was not in the book but Khirode Babu was asked to revise the drama and insert a character so that the patron Goddess of Jessore (Josoreswari) might be represented not only in statue but also as one moving in flesh and blood. Bejoya thus came into being and this is the most central and attractive character in the plot. Her songs, her exhortations to Protap and Sankar and the timely hymn which she asked Chandibar the priest to sing "Gao

Chandibar Gao" acted as an inspiration to the audience.

Pratapaditya was staged on August 15, 1903 and the Star now began to draw over-crowded houses every evening and many had to return disappointed for want of accommodation. * It had a continued run for 25 nights and the play too was very successful. About 200 chairs had to he provided each night and the cast was distributed as follows :—

Pratapaditya—Amrita Lal Mittra, Bikramaditya and Rodda—Ardhendu Sarkar Mustafi, Akbar—Upendra Mitra, Sankar—Mahendra Choudhuri, Govinda Das—Kasi Nath Chatterjee, Basanta Roy—Akshoy Kali Koer, Chandi Bar—Nagendra Nath Mukherjee, Selim—Nani Lal Dutta, Bijoya—Nari Sundari, Kalyani—Basanta Kumari, Chhoto Rani—Mrinalini, Protap's wife—Saraju Bala, Bhabananda—Hira Lal Datta.

Srijukta Kshetramani Devi had also a part which she did to a finish.

As Sitaram, Kedar Roy and Protap are the real heroes of Bengal, so the effect on the Bengali audience was marvellous. Besides the

* The author had an experience of this. Coming from Mofusil he wanted on a Saturday evening to purchase a ticket for as 8, but was told that even four rupee seats were sold up.

times were also exciting. Anglo-Indian papers, however, became vocal.

The Englishman wanted the Government to take special measures as the ideas the drama intended to propagate were dangerous. The Star, however, hit upon a novel idea of pointing out to the people, when Protap was taken under chains, the image of the Goddess of England and that our salvation lies there. This seemed to have pacified the situation. The acting of the drama on the whole was so excellent that Amarendra Nath in his attempt to compete with Star put on its board on the 29th August 1903 Pratapaditya dramatised by himself from Haran Rakshit's *Banger Sesh Bir*; but his attempt too, like Sitaram, proved abortive.

After tottering for five years the Star once again became very popular now. The mofussil students after the F. A. Examination was over, requested the Star company to show them a performance of Chandra Sekhar which they gladly did. Enthusiasm was really great.

Toward the middle of 1904, Dani Babu joined Star from Classic and appeared as Balai Sardar in Kshirode Prosad's Ranjabati * staged on September 30, 1904. He was well matched

* The story was taken from Dharmamongal by Ghonoram.

with Dalua Sarhar in whose role his master (Guru)—Amrita Mitter appeared. He also appeared in the role of Rodda, when Mr. Mustafi left for the Minerva ; but was no match for his predecossor whose parting word "Sorry, Raja" still resounds in the ears of those who once heard him,

The well-known actress Khetra Moni Devi appeared in a minor role as an old Dom woman and used to speak in the Dom dialect. This petty part was the most enjoyable one especially when she used to say "Death by tying a rope round the neck ? Let me go and see it. For long have I not witnessed such a pleasant spectacle" ! Babu Akshoy Kali Koer took the part of Rajnarain Singh.

Star gave the X'mas present of "Bahaba Bateek" by Amirta Lal Bose.

Khirode Prasad produced another drama *Narayani* on the 15th April 1904. The famous dramatist Dwijendra Lal Roy's *Ranapratap* (22nd July. 1905), became now the main attraction and audience used to be very large. The play was very successful with Amirta Mitter as Pratap and Amirta Bose as Sakta. Both the parts were very well rendered. It acted like fire with the youth at that time of the infancy of nationalism.

The story was related as to how Padmini preferred to burn herself to death and thereby save Chitore from ruin to offering herself to Alauddin's lust. The play staged on the 23rd December 1905 was very much liked and the cast was distributed as follows :—

Padmini—Basanta Kumari, Nashibon—Nari Sundari, Do father—Akshoy Babu, Gora—Kashinath Chatterjee, Arun Shing's wife—Saraju, Laksman Singh—Amirta Mittra, Bhim Shingh—Upendra Mitra.

This was followed by a new swadeshi sketch in December 1905 "Sabash Bangali" from the pen of Babu Amrita Lal Bose. The opening song "Amara Nehat Gareeb, Amra Nehat Chhota, Sat Koti Bangali Tobu jege Otho" was greatly appreciated by all. The farce spoke of youngmen of the university carrying in bundles of country-made-clothes to people and of women spinning yarns at the Charkas. Star put on its boards another piece of Khirode Prosad—*Ulupi* describing the battle between Arjuna and his son Babhrubahana. The next piece *Palashir Prayaschitta* followed Girish Chandra's Mirkasim at Minerva. It was acted here from the 4th of August, 1906, the 8th night of Mirkasim and though no match for the master-piece of Girish, was on the whole a successful performance. The cast was as follows :

Mirzafar—Upendra Mittra, Mirkasim—Amritalal

Mitra, Mohonlal—Aparesh Chandra Mukherjee, Raja Ramaran—Mohendra Master, Raja Ballav—Nonilal Dutt, Seraj's Begum—Basanta Kumari,

Mirkashim was the last performance of Amrita Lal Mitter in a new drama and inspite of his ill health he acquitted himself wonderfully. Aparesh Babu who appeared as Mohan Lall's role wrote of him hereafter—

"The lion was worn out with age and diseased. Even in that condition such flashes of lightening were now and then omitted by him at the Palasheer Prayaschitta that used to send a thrill to the hearts of the audience." Play was successful but there was not much out-turn of money.

Now came a change in the Star Theatre. Amarendra Nath whose Classic Theatre was broken up with his insolvency, returned with renewed health and vigour and on arrival from Bombay, accepted the post of the Assistant Manager of the Star Theatre that was offered to him and appeared for the first time as Pratap, Babu Amrita Lall Mitter taking the part of Chandra Sekhar and Amrita Babu (Bose) taking that of Laurence Foster. On the 18th May 1907 Mr. Dutt made his first bow to the audience. Kusum Kumari also accompanied Amar Babu

and appeared in the roles of Sarala and Saibalini, with Amrita Bose as Nil Kamal.

It was at this time Girish Chandra, having recovered from effects of long illness, announced appearance on the Minerva Stage in his inimitable role of Jogesh on Sunday the 2nd June 1907. For the last twelve years since 1895, Star ceased putting the play on its boards but now with the infusion of new strength Babu Amrita Lall Mitra stood for the second and last time in competition with his Guru (Master) Girish Chandra. It will be interesting to let our readers know the comparative casts which are given as follows :—

	Star	**Minerva**
Jogesh	A. L. Mitter	G. C. Ghose
Ramesh	A. L. Bose	A. Mustafi
Suresh	Kashi Chatterji	Dani Babu
Bhajahari	Amarendra Dutt	Akshoy Chakravorty
Kangali	Hiralal Dutt	Nripen Bose.
Madan Dada	Upendra Mitra	Nilmadhab Babu
Pitambar	Mohendra Master	
Jnanadasundari	Basanta Kumari	Tincowrie
Profulla	Kusumkumari	Susila Bala
Jogamoni		Jagat Tarini.

Bhajahari was unique at the Star and Akshoy Chakravarty, another comedian of the day was no match for him. Ramesh too

would befit Mr. Bose better than his colleague Mustafi Saheb but Tincowrie, Jagattarini, Dani Babu, Nripen Bose far surpassed their rivals in Star. Girish was Jogesh personified and requires no further comment, and with him after all a real Profulla was found in Sushila.

The competition lasted two nights only, but though Star drew crowds to see the combination of Amrita and Amar, Minerva positively carried off the palm this time as well.

Amarendra Nath stayed here for about three months only and left towards the middle of July 1907 as assistant Manager for the Minerva. Subsequently he became Manager on the 11th August, 1907 and appeared as Sivaji.

About the time when Chhatrapati was scoring great success at Minerva and Kohinoor, Star revived its temporary depression caused by Amrendra's resignation and by the protracted illness of Babu Amrita Lall Mitra, by staging a sensational historical piece, *Maharaja Nanda Kumar.* Maharaja Nanda Kumar is a favourate name with the people of Bengal who, from school days have read about the quarrel between Nando Kumar and the then Governor General Warren Hastings who as the popular belief goes, got his friend Sir Elija Impey the Chief

Justice of Bengal to pass unjustly the sentence of death on the Maharaja. It is a subject of national interest which the eloquence of the great Edmund Burke had made famous throughout the world and over which the eminent jurists—James Stephen and Judge Beveriege,* employed much ink and wit to review the subject in big volumes. It was a duel between the Maharaja and Warren Hastings, and every student must be interested in the statement in the Hicky's Bengal Gazette which runs thus :—"Clive was made a peer in England, though he committed in Bengal the same crime for which we hanged Maharaja Nunda Coomar".

It was at this time (end of 1906) Barrister Mr. P. Mitter the well-known National leader published the verbatim report of the trial of Maharaja Nanda Kumar with an introduction, and the drama staged so soon after this and specially during those stirring times of the Partition of Bengal became very popular.

This is no place to relate the history of the trial, the justness or otherwise of the charges or of authenticity of the evidence, and whatever the verdict of the jury was, History however has given one verdict only in the

* We are told Mr. Justice Ameer Ali is pursuing the most learned research over "Nanda Kumar."

condemnation of the men who engineered the trial and that the "Execution of Nanda Coomer was a judicial murder". *

Ere this we had the whole history depicted in the well known book "Maharaja Nanda Kumar" of Babu Chandi Charan Sen, and the drama now acted was a matter of great interest. The heroic resignation of the Maharaja was well mirrored in, and Babu Nagendra Nath Mukherjee a young amateur who had acted successfully the role of Chandibar, in Protapaditya, showed fully the spirit of the hero, and at once secured the plaudits of the public in this role. The Bengali says—"His Statesman-like qualities, his heroic stand against the clique of Hastings and Barwell and the softer qualities of his heart were well depicted by Nagendra Babu, who though in this book alone, filled up the void created by the stubborn illness of Amrita Lall." Hasting's movements, deportment of the Governor General and his joy in

* The trial of Nanda Coomer commencing on the 8th June 1775, was before the Chief Justice and four other Justices aided by 12 European Jurors with Mr. John Robinson as Foreman. On the 24th July after the Chief Justice delivered his charge, the jury retired for an hour and returned a verdict of guilty, and the beloved Maharaja was hanged on 5th Aug. 1775.

success were masterfully shown by Akshoy Kali Koer, Bapudeb Sastri the spiritual Guru of Nanda Kumar too was ably represented by Babu Mahendra Choudhury. These main characters were fully supported by Tarasundari in the role of Radhika—Shastri's second daughter who was the leader of a dacoits' gang and did full justice to her part, but when she dispersed them, her chief lieutenant parted in surprise "Betika Daine peyeche"—a soreceress has overtaken the mother—and this part was played by Babu Noni Lall Dutt. The part of Promoda was played by Miss Basanta Kumari and that of Radhacharan the son-in-law of Nanda Kumar by Babu Kunjalal Chakravarty who was well sustained by Babu Hiralal Dutt in the part of the villain Kamaluddin.

Nanda Kumar, however was the last glare of light emitted by a burnt-up candle. The Star began to decline day by day and the climax of misfortune overtook it at last, when on the Dol-festival day in March 1908, Amrit Lall Mitra died after a protracted illness. This calamity so much overwhelmed the Star, it remained practically closed for sometime. Over a month, however, some changes occured in the dramatic world. Girish Chandra with his troupe re-joined Minerva, taking leave of Kohinoor and

Amarendra with Kusum Kumari came back to the Star again as Assistant Manager. They appeared as Pratap and Saibalini with Mr. Amrita Bose and Nari Sundari as Chandra Sekhar and Dalani on the 25th April 1908. Thus did Star express :—

"Chastened by chastisement from Heaven, we have wiped out tears, shaken off our lethargy and stand ready for action."

On June 20, 1908, Sourendra Mukherjee's *Jat Kinchit* was staged with Amarendra as Sukumar.

Next were staged *Kamini Kanchan* on 22nd August 1908 and Jivan Sandhya on 21-11-1908 rendered by Babu Amarendra from Mr. R. C. Dutt's novel into drama. In the second he appeared as Tejsingh with Kusum Kumari as Dalia.

Amarendranath next left the Star as he took lease of the Bengal Stage, starting the Great National Theatre.

After Amarendra left, Star Theatre-proprietors decided not to run any theatre. Nageswara and Sultana both of Vidyavinode were their last performance on 30th April 1911.

Amarendra Nath now came back and took lease of the Star Theatre at 25 p. c. of the gross sales. He brought his own theatrical party with him from the Great National.

The Star Theatre-proprietors were also very much gratified to see their theatre placed in the hands of Amarendra as he was the most lively and central figure then living amongst the leaders of the Stage. On the first night Nov. 11, 1911 when Amarendra first appeared as the lessee, Babu Amrita Bose appeared before foot-lights and expressed sorrowfully :—

"The luminaries of the Bengal Stage have all disappeared one by one. Only Girish Babu and myself are still in life, Girish Babu is lying in bed, diseases overpowering him. I too am old. There is no second man now who can take the helm of this theatre. Amarendranath is very expert in conducting theatres ; besides he is high-minded and born of a very respectable family".

After having staged Balidan and Vilwamangal on 6th November at Great National, Amarendranath's party first appeared here on the 11th November 1911 in Bhupen Banerjee's "*Satsanga*" *. Jivon *Sangram* † of Naren

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* Satsanga :—
Probodh—Amarendra, Sukumar—Kunja Chakrabarty, Sadananda—Kartic Dey, Patit paban—Ashay Chakrabarty, Hemangini—Sushilabala.

† Jiban Sangram :—
Mirjan—Amarendra, Ali Ibrahim—Kunja Babu, Rahaman—Akshay Babu, Jinnat—Basanta, Mamtaz —Susila, Minar—Rani, Samsel Nihar—Kohinoorbala.

Sarkar was staged on 20th December. Between the two, Mr. D. L. Roy's amusing farce "***Hari Nath's journey to his father-in law's house***" delighted the audience very much. Enjoyment was pure and there was no vulgarity in it.

Amrita Babu was, however, given the honour as dramatic Director and on which-ever night he would appear, an honorarium of R. 25/- was to be paid to him.

The most note-worthy piece staged in the Star after Amar Babu took charge of it was *Khas Dakhal by Amrita Babu.* It is the best and most improved form of all the farces hitherto composed by him put together. Yet it was not a farce and may also be called a good drama.

It is a comedy and the amusement was chaste and highly instructive. Thus it can be distinguished from Chira Kumar Sabha which too is chaste and entertaining but has little of instruction in it like Khasdakhal every word of which misses fire. It was a very happy day for the Bengali stage that the first drama from the pen of Amrita Lall after Girish Chandra's death was as good and chaste as would have been desired by his Gurudeb. The performance was highly successful and Amrita Babu too was

at his best. His rendering of the part of Netai was superb. "Is the" became hereafter a common saying. Along with him may be mentioned the part of Giribala as rendered by Sushilabala. Her "Bhatar Keman Misti"—was a very enjoyable song which has increased her celebrity all the more.

Amar Babu's part of Mohit was also very well rendered. So did Basanta as Mokshada and Kunja Babu as Thakurda. Basanta's "What, My temperature is 99 ?" became also a favourite expression with audience. It puts a sling on the so called advanced people of South Calcutta. Other artists also did well, the remaining cast being as follows :—

Maitee—Kashi Nath Chatterjee, Suresh—Kshetra Mohan Mitra, Loken—Gopal Das Bhattacharjee, Ramesh—Hiralal Dutta, Sarada—Sashi Bhusan Bose (Amrita Babu's son), Ananda Kabiraj—Radhakishore Kar, Dr. Banerjee—Ghanashyam Biswas, Dr. Mullick — Jitendra Nath Ghose, Muchiram and Gunadhar Ghosh — Dhirendra Mukherjee, Kabiraj and Dr. Pakrashi, and Kali—Kartic De, Tapasiwiram—Bishnoo Charan De Rati—Rani Sundari, Bidhoo—Mrinalini, Albadi — Kumudini, Labonya — Kohinoorbala, Mahalakshmi — Pannarani, Bibhash — Hemanta Kumari, Mrinal—Nalini Bala, Kabiraj—Upen Mitra.

The performance was highly successful and was repeated for weeks. We need not dilate on the performance too much and shall quote only the observations of the Amrita Bazar Patrika of 21st August 1912.

"......It will be simply unnecessary on our part to pass any remark at present on "Khas Dakhal" which has been drawing bumper house though staged week after week for the last four months on every occasion."

Amarendra Nath revived Chandra Sekhar * which had been proscribed in 1911 and put it on boards on the 10th and 14th August 1912 himself taking the roles of Protap and Laurance Foster with Amrita Bose as Chandra Sekhar.

The next piece was *Paraparey* by Mr. D. L. Roy staged on August 17, 1912. Here too Amarendra Nath as Bisweshwar, Susila as Santa and Basanta as Sarajoo were superb.

The cast was as follows :—

Dayal—Gopal Das Bhattacharjee, Bhabani Prosad—Kashi Nath Chatterjee, Parbati—Upendra Nath Mitra, Mahim—Kunja Chakravarty, Kali Charan—Manomohan Goswami, Paresh—Kartic De, Charu—Akshoy Chakravarty, Ostadji—Lakshi Kanta Mukerji.

* Proscribed along with Serajoddoula etc.

Dwijendra Lall's sarcastic parody *Ananda Vidya* was staged on the 16th November, 1912 but as it tended to cast reflection on the great Rabindra Nath, the audience did not receive it in good sport. Performance necessarily had to be stopped, the audience shouting 'Down with the performance'. It is likely that the result of this farce might have given Dwijendra Lal a great shock.

In 1913 Manomohan Goswami's Dharma Biplab (29th March) with Amarendra as Kalachand, Narisundari as Durgabati, Basanta Dulari and Susilabala as Surama needs little mention. Amarendra's farce "Kismiss" * (3rd May, 1913) was a very amusing one Lovechand was superb.

In 1913 Tincowrie Dasi joined the Star and appeared as *Jana* (16th August) with Amarendra as Prabeer and also as Sree (on 30th Aug.) in *Sitaram* with Amarendra as Sitaram, Khetra Babu as Gangaram, Susila as Joyanti and Kusum as Nanda. She was here only about a month.

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* School Superintendent—A. N. Dutt, Lovechand (youngman)—Susilabala, Bilashbati—Nari Sundari, Kismiss—Basanta Kumari, Lady Superintendent—Panna Rani.

On December 20, 1913 Joy Pataka and 17th January, 1914 Mayapuri of Ram Lal—as also and Amarendra's piece on 30th May "Bara Bhalabashi" need no mention, but on the 15th August 1914 *Ahalyabai* by Moni Lall Bandopadhaya was staged with following :—

Malhar Rao—Amarendra, Janhuji—Hari Bhusan, Mala Rao—Nripendra Bose, Govinda Pantha—Kunja Chakravarty, Som Nath—Manmotho Nath Pal, Lakhi Kanta—Hira Lall Datta, Nandoji—Akshoy Kumar Chakravarty, Mundo Rao—Dhirendra Mukerjee, Tukaji—Gopla Das Bhattacharjee, Madhob Rao—Surendra Nath Ghose, Nizam—Atindra Bhattacharjee, Gangadhar—Haripada Sarkar, Ahalyabai—Kusum Kumari, Gangabai—Nari Sundari, Tulsi—Basanta Kumari, Narayani—Rani Sundari, Rukmini—Punto Rani.

'Malhar Rao' was rendered very well. It was at this time the Howitt Phillip Company was showing some Performances at the Grand Opera House, Mr. Howitt taking the leading parts. Mr. Howit co-operated with Amarendra Nath in his benifit performance held on September 11, 1914. Chuni Babu too with Grand National joined him.

31st October *Akalanka Shasi* (rendered from Rabindro Nath's *story Didi*) was staged with Amarendra as Joy Gopal Dutt.

On the 5th December 1914, Kshatrabeer by Bhupendra Nath was staged by Amarendra with Amrita Bose as Dhritarastra and himself as Probir, Handu Babu as Karna and Akhoy Chakravarty as Sakuni.

On the 26th December, Amarendra's "*Abhinetrir rupa*" was staged with himself as Nalini, Amrita Lal Bose as Anangamohan, Kusum Kumari as Chandra, Basanta Kumari as Nirupama, Mr, Palit as Bemolandu and Susilabala as Durga.

The last-named star, Sushila the nightangle of the Bengali Stage and the most talented and powerful actress fell ill and in the above role her appearance on January 2, 1915 was the last. Bengal Stage lost a great star by her death. Scarcely did an actress on the stage possess her qualities all combined together.

Premer Zeplin and Belwari were worthless pieces. "*Sign of the Cross*" was acted well (*February* 27, 1915) and Amarendra Nath as Marcus Superbus did very well. 'Sign of The Cross' was a dignified performance and the conceptions of parts were correct. Mr. Dutt and Kusum Kumari as Marcus and Mercia rendered their parts admirably, and the remaining cast was also brilliant—

Nero—Kunja Chakravarty, Tijlinas—Handu Babu, Phabius—Hira Lall Dutt, Licivius—Probodh Bose, Glabrio—Gopal Das Babu, Servillus—Kartic De, Titus —Lakhikanta Mukerjee, Berinis—Basanta.

Madhob Rao Peswa * was staged on 17th Apil 1915 with Kunja Babu as Madhab Rao and Kusum Kumari as Ramabai.

Somtime Amarendra was Narayan Rao. Kusum's part was well rendered. He also appeared as Aurangzeb in 'Shajahan.'

In 1915, Monomohon Theatre was started at Kohinoor Stage, and Upendra Mitra became lessee of the Minerva Theatre. Thespian Temple was started by Kshetro Mohan Mitra. Grand National however was stopped and Chuni Lal Deb joined the Star Theatre.

Amarendra Nath was keeping indifferent health and appeared as Sontal Sardar on 17th July in "Kalyani", and as *Raja Chandra Dhwaja* in the drama of the name by Jagat Chandra Sen on 21st August 1915 with Kusum as Manimala. The drama was instructive but

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*** Narain Rao—Dhiren Babu, Rughunath Rao—Handu Babu, Apaji Rao—Nripendra Babu, Sakhiram—Gopal Babu, Golam Kader—Hira Lal Babu, Anandibai—Basanta, Johedi—Charubala.**

had no stage-effect. *Bratodjapona* was staged on September 18.

Amar Babu also appeared as Sanatan in *Ratnamonjuri* on October 9, 1915, with Kasi Babu as Jagannath, Handu Babu--Dhanapati, Akshoy Chakrvarty—Sibram, Nripendra Bose as Sadananda, Kusum as Ratnamonjuri.

"Saudagar" the Bengali rendering from Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice was staged on the 4th December 1915 with Amarendra Nath in the role of Kulirok (Shylock). This part was acted successfully by Maclean, Kean, Iriving in England and Amarendra Nath too gave incontrovertible proofs of his histrionic talents of a high order in the representation of this part, the dress, postures and movements all befitting the character of Shylock. But this was the last and the tragic night appeared very soon.

On the 11th December 1915, Saudagar was announced with his name to play in the role of Kuliroka, but he vomitted blood and fever ran high. It was not possible to act the part, and Babu Kunja Lall Chrkravarty appeared for him. The audience however, was so much excited that Amarendra Nath had to leave his bed and appear before the audience and express inability.

He, however, begged of them to allow him to appear in the first Act only and the sympathetic audience was fully satisfied. Next day, too, he appeared as Aurangzeb, but owing to the relapse could not proceed after the second Act. This was the last. The great actor, manager and organiser, one of the most popular figures of the Bengali Stage could not come round but began to sink and on the 6th January 1916, Amarendra Nath breathed his last.

Amarendra Nath's career on here was finished and with his death his party too was disbanded. After the death of Amarendranath, Star Theatre-proprietors conducted the Theatre for about a year and then Ananga Haldar took lease for sometime. But nothing could be done. During these two years the following dramas were staged at the Star Theatre :—

1916—8th April — Hemendra Lal (Bhupen)—Hemendralal—Kunja Chakravarty.

3rd May—Ballal Sen (Jogindra Bose).

24th June—Jado Bharata,

9th September—Baranoshi (Moni Banerjee)

23rd December—Karmafal (Mono Goswami)

| Deven — Author, Sushoma — Kusum and Bidhubhusan—Kshetro Babu.]

1917—Devabala (Jogendra Bose), with Kusum Kumari as Debabala, and Ascharja as Sannyasini.

23rd September—Ruper Nesha.

1918—12 January—Rano Bheri (Dasharathi).

19th January—Muchiram Goor (Bankim Chatterjee.) Muchiram—Kusum Kumari.

In 1918 Giri Mohan Mullick became lessee and *Birajbou* of Babu Sarat Chatterjee dramatised by Bhupendra Banerjee was staged with the following cast :—

Jadu—Amrita Bose, Nilamber—Mr. Palit, Pitamber—Kshetro Babu, Biraj—Kusum kumari, Sundari—Basanta.

Biraj Bou commanded a very good sale. Palit used to acquit himself well and after him Monomohan Babu used to appear and sometime Lakshi Babu also used to appear.

In the beginning of the next year Aparesh Babu became the manger of the Theatre under Giri Babu as lessee. Babu Probodh Chandra Guha was with him to assist in the management. The first drama staged on 8th March 1919 was *Othello,* rendered into Bengali from Shakespeare by the veteran litterateur Babu Devandra Nath Bose. The dramatisation was very good and the cast was as follows :—

Othello—Palit, Iago—Aparesh Babu, Cassio—Probodh Bose, Desdemona—Tara Sundari, Nerissa—Neroda Sundari.

The sales in the first night were good, but fell down from the second. None of the parts except that of Tarasundari was done to the spirit of the dramatist.

On the 30th March, Nirmal Sib Banerjee's *Mukhermata* was staged, and *Kinnari* was then put on boards with Tarasundari as Utpal, Basanta Kumari as Makari and Neroda Sundari as Kinnari (original). As soon as Upendra Babu of Minerva came to know this, he immediately prayed for injunction. After some evidence, the High Court granted the injunction as prayed for under the Copy Right Act.

Aparesh Babu then wrote "Urbashi" in competition with Kinnari but this too inspite of the good acting of Tara as Basantaka did not prove better. The unsuccessful mounting of Othello and the subsequent insignificant pieces told upon the financial condition of the lessee and "Dumukha Sap" a farce by Aparesh Babu refers to the calumnies of persons in reference to the manager's activities.

Having suffered losses, Babu Giri Mohon Mullick gave up the lease. *

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* Bhupendra Banerjee's Baibaheek was staged on December 24, 1919.

In 1920, Aparesh Chandra himself became the lessee with the help of Tara Sundari who not only contributed a large amount to the reconstruction of the stage, but took much pains in coaching the female parts.

Rakheebandhan was staged on June 5, 1920 with Palit as Chandrabat and Tarasundari as Dhara. This was followed by Debendra Nath Bose's *Kuhaki* (June 19 1920), Aparesh Chandra's Chhinnahar on June 21, with Tara as Lila was partly successful. All these pieces are not much worth-mentioning but *Ajodhyarbegum* staged on December 3, 1921 was attractive. The times were propitious for reception of a National Hero and Chuni Babu as Mirkashim did well. Aparesh Babu (the author) was in the role of Hafezar Rahaman, Tarasundari of Begum, Krishna Bhamini of Chhaya and Niharbala of Jinnat. The last two actresses made their mark here-after. Krishnabhamini's part was trained by the leading actress Tara-sundari herself specially at her house as she wanted this new actress gain the reputation she deserved, due to her talents. But the sales were not up to mark.

The following pieces though done well in 1922 did not create much enthusiasm :—

July 1—*Nababi Amal* (Nirmal Shib)

Ramprasad—Purna Ghosh, Khatija—Tara, Hossen —Handu Babu, Raghab—Chuni Babu, Chinmoyee—Krishnabhamini.

August 19.—Apsara—(Aparesh Babu)

September 23—*Sudama* do do

The sales came down and it became very difficult for Aparesh Babu to continue. He ran into debt and Tarasundari also had to suffer much pecuniary loss.

ART THEATRE CO., LIMITED.

At this time some gentlemen of lead and light formed themselves into a joint stock company under the name of The Art Theatre Limited, to have dramas staged on approved lines leaving aside pieces that have lost interest after a short period. The directors were Babus Nirmal Chandra Chandra, Kumar Krishna Mitra, Haridas Chatterjee, Bhupendra Nath Banerjee, Gadadhar Mullick and Satish Chandra Sen (managing director). They spared no money and pains for the improvement of the stage and put Aparesh Chandra in charge of the whole show. It was settled that Aparesh Babu would make over charge of all his paraphernalia to the company, his debt would be cleared at

company's money and that he would write and secure dramas and himself would be master of rehearsals. He was to get a salary of Rs. 500/- a month and a lump sum for each drama.

Babu Probodh Guha became the Secretary and practically the business manager.

There was however one omission. The greatest female artist of the time Tarasundari who in the Theatrical concerns suffered much loss for the Star was left out at first and when next the Company offered a post to her, the latter as a self-respecting artist had to disappoint the party. The manuscripts of *Karnarjun* had been finished at the Star when Apsara and Sudama were being staged, and the Art Theatre now opened on the Star stage with this drama.

People were anxious for new spirit, new energy and new faces, and Art Theatre was successful in bringing this view into perfection, for the first time as an organised institution. It was at this time some amateur artists took up the profession of actors on the stage and the Bengali Stage was thus rejuvinated with the infusion of new blood. In 1921 first of all Mr. Shishir Bhaduri M. A., left the teaching work for love of art and joined Madan's Bengali Theatrical company. He

was soon joined by Babus Tulsi Banerjee, Rabi Roy and others. In 1922 Babu Naresh Chandra Mitra B. L. and Babu Radhikananda Mukherjee two youngmen joined the Minerva Stage and shortly after Babu Nirmalendu Lahiri another specimen of a fine figure also joined the Bengal Theatrical Co. It now became also possible for the Art Theatre Limited to secure some prominent artists from amateur parties and amongst others, Babus Tincorie Chakravarty, Ahindra Choudhury, Indu Bhusan Mukherjee, Durgadas Banerjee may be prominently mentioned.

With the new cast and improvements *Karnarjun* which was written sometime ago, but now recast with improvements was put on boards of the Star Theatre on the 30th June, 1923. The cast was as follows—

Karna — Tincowrie Babu, Arjoon — Ahindra Choudhury, Parasuram—Aparesh Mukherjee, Sakuni —Naresh Mitra, Bhima — Santosh Das (Bhulu), Bheem—Noni Gopal Dutt, Durjadhan—Profulla Sen Gupta, Duswasan—Tulsi Banerjee, Bikarna—Durgadas Banerjee, Padmabati—Krishna Bhamini, Neoti—Niharbala, Draupadi—Nivanoni, Kunti—Haripriya.

The play was successful and Karnarjun acted on Saturday and Sunday fetched much money to the Company. The beginning proved

very successful and all the parts were well-performed. After Karnarjun, Raja O Rani and Chandra Gupta were revived, the former on 29th August and the latter on October 10. Aparesh Mukherjee's new piece *Iraner Rani*—a romantic drama was next staged on 1st January, 1924 Krishnabhamini taking the part of Rani, Ahindra Babu that of Dara Jobeyar, Tincowrie Babu of Daud Shah, Neeharbala as Nartaki, and Durgadas Babu Kazi. It was acted on each Wednesday.

In 1924, Dani Babu was taken to the Art Theatre Limited sometime in September, on an agreement for three years, terms of which ran that he would get Rs. 800/- per month for the first year, Rs. 900/- for the second and Rs 1,000/- in the third year. He was generally to appear on Thursdays and Fridays, as the three important days were covered by Karnarjoon and Iraner Rani. Inspite of the presence of the new artists and the cowardly attempts of some to belittle him, Dani Babu was at his best and each night he appeared in old plays sales rose from Rs.1,500/- to Rs.2,200/- and even more,—when he was on the stage as Chanakya. The directors were all courteous and respectful to him and he was as vigorous on the stage as a young man. It appeared that the former stupor

at Monomohan was no longer there and even newspapers of the Modern period began to praise him. The pieces he generally appeared here in were as follows :—

(1) Chanakya in Chandra Gupta, (2) Aurangzeb in Shajahan, (3) Karunamoy in Balidan (sometime as Dulal) (4) Vidushaka in Jana and sometime as Prabir (5) Jogesh in Profulla, (6) Upen in Griha-lakshmi, (7) Nagendra Nath in Bishabriksha and also in other pieces.

As Jogesh he used to appear for some nights and Aparesh Babu supported him as Madan Dada and Ahindra Choudhury as Ramesh.

In Chanakya he used to be at his best. Mr. Durgadas Banerjee made a good mark as Chandra Gupta and so did Ahindra Choudhury as Seluccus. Chandra Gupta used to be often played * here and when Radhika Babu joined theatre in 1925, and supported the brilliant cast by his wonderful performence of Antigonus, the play became more attractive.

In Shajahan Dani Babu's Aurangzeb was good ; and so did Ahindra Babu with his brilliant

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* It commenced with Tincourie Babu as Chanakya (1923), sometime before Dani Babu joined. Katyaon used to be done by Mr. Naresh Mitra and Chandra Gupta by Durgadas Babu.

make-up and artistic acting, capture the imagination of the audience. He fully satisfied the tastes of the audience who were then used to the poises and expressions of artists overseas, as seen on the screen, but looked at deeply, it must be admitted that he lacked the pathos the original actor Babu Preonath Ghose showed some years ago, Nirmalendu Babu's Dildar was very enjoyable.

In "Balidan" at a later period Dani Babu appeared for two nights as Karunamoy and Tincowrie Babu as Dulal. Next when he (Dani) appeared as Dulal for three nights Aparesh Babu used to be Karunamoy. Krishnabhamini and Niharbala used to appear as Kiran and Hiron and Sushilasundari and Ascharja used to be Saraswati and Jobi. This last pair even a few days ago for nights appeared in their respective roles during the Girish Centenary in Balidan and were displaying the same powers as before, although they were far advanced in age.

Nirmal Shib Banerjee's *Rup Kumari* was staged on December 3, 1924, with Nihar as Kalabati, and Nivanoni as Rup Kumari.

"*Bandini*" by Aparesh Babu was successfully staged on December 25, 1924 and the cast was as follows :—

Iskibole—Author (Aparesh Babu), Tabez—Ashcharjya, Amsis—Aheendra Babu, Bandini—Feroza, Mitanee Raja—Durga Prasanna Bose, Naherin—Nihar, Princess Irvia—Ranisundari, Pharao—Prafulla Sen Gupta, Puraheet—Brojendra Sarkar

In 1925 February 4, *Golkonda* by Kshirode Prosad was staged with the following cast :—

Aurongzeb—Ahindra Choudhury, Mirjumla—Tincowrie Chakravorty, Hasan—Nirmolendu Lahiri, Selima—Subashini, Mohomed—Indu Mukherjee, Arzmand—Krishnabhamini, Ahiron—Nibhanani.

Aheendra Babu's make-up and expressions were grand. He rendered Aurongzeb as a pious and thougtful prince, and Nirmal Babu exhibited real talents in his part. The drama, however, did not prove a very succesful one.

It was at this time Girish Chandra's *Jana* was revived and before Mr. Shishir Bhadury opened Jana at Natya Mondir on the 3rd June 1925, Art Theatre had already a number of performances with Dani Babu as Vidushaka, and

Ahindra Babu as—Prabir, Nirmal Babu—Arjun, Sushila Sundri—Jana, Aschorjamoye—Naika, Nihar Bala—Madan Munjuri.

After some performances, Dani Babu at the earnest request of Aparesh Babu and a few directors took up his original role of Prabir, his

part of Vidushaka being acted by Tincowrie Babu.

'Jana' was admirably acted and as to the performance, we would better quote the *Amritabazar Patrika* of—**JUNE 21, 1925.**

"Those who have witnessed the older days' performance of Girish Chandra's master-piece "Jana" on the board of the old Minerva Theatre with the immortal author as Bidushak, young Dani Babu as Probir and the great actress late Miss. Tincowrie as Jana in her inimitable rendering of this character as her speciality—would undoubtedly admire the bold venture by the authorities of the Art Theatre Limited in reviving the popular play with their present combination of staff at the disposal. The play has been running on for the last few weeks and on each night the house was found crowded with eager spectators which bespeaks of their success.

"The role of Bidushak as represented by Mr. Tincowri Chakravorty was very impressive no doubt, but here and there he lacked in the gravity which was characteristic of Bidushak as pointed by the author—a simple Brahmin as he was—but an embodiment of great believer that salvation is a matter of consequence if man once utters the name of "Hari". However, Mr. Chakravorty acquitted creditably before the audience.

"Babu Surendra Nath Ghose (Dani Babu) the Dramatic Director of the company deserves admira-

tion for his boldness to re-appear as Probir after many decades and at this advanced age. Though there seemed to be very little in this part—Dani Babu won great applause at the scene where he was helplessly and under peculiar circumstances challenged by Arjuna after being betrayed by the Maya Nayika. But the tiny figure of Madan Manjuri (wife of Probir) before the stalwart Probir was an unequal combination.

"Miss Sushila Sundari in her appearance in the title role did full justice to the part entrusted to her from the rise of the curtain till it finally dropped. After the masterly and capital rendering of this part by the great actress Tincowrie we had little confidence in any body else thereafter—but we miscalculated, for Sushila Sundari did not fall far short in her mark. We marked she had studied the character very deeply and thoroughly well and reproduced the same beyond our expectation. Her elocution was splendid, movements very appropriate and though in some instances her voice could not reach that pitch of Tincowrie—but that was compensated by her very apt and appropriate expression all through. Other characters need some improvement which we expect to be so done next time. On the whole the play was a success. We hear the play will be repeated on Saturday next".

The great Deshbandhu C. R. Dass passed away on the 16th June 1925, and all theatres contributed greatly to the Deshbandhu memorial fund started by Mahatma Gandhi. All the

proprietors and artists of Star Theatre too, headed by Natyacharja Amrita Bose, paid homage to the Great Leader from the stage and sang a song composed by Aparesh Babu.

On the eighteenth July 1925, Rabindra Nath's *"Chira Kumar Sabha"* was staged with Aparesh Babu as Rasik, Ahindra Babu as Chandra, Tincowri Babu as Akshoy, Durgadas Banerjee as Purna, Radhikananda Babu as Bepin, Indu Babu as Srish, Niharbala as Nerobala, Rani Sundari as Purabala, Sushila as Saila, Feroza as Nripabala, Nando Rani Jaguttarini, Nivanani as Nirmola. Babu Dinendra Nath Tagore helped in music and Abanindra Nath Tagore in scenes and scenery. The poet (author) was also present in the second night of performance on (25-7-25) and admired the representation immenensely. Indeed the performance was very sucessful and Rashik, Chandra, Akshoy, Purna and Nihar were appreciated as best. It was very enjoyable and the mirth it produced was free from any vulgarity. We have often seen the play and considered the acting as a grand one. The poet himself called Aparesh Bubu as Rasik Babu. Chandra Babu fully represented Babu Rajaram Bose who was probably referred to by the author and Tincowri Babu with his songs and demeanour, appeared very digni-

fied. Last though not the least, Purna appeared as the most interesting character on the stage, although for a few nights the part was a little overdone.

Chandra Sekhar too was revived on August 28 with Babus Radhika and Durgadas as Chandra Sekhar and Protap, Ahindra Babu as Nabab and Sushila Sundari and Ascharjamoee as Saibalini and Dalani.

Poet's *Grihaprabesh* was staged on December 5, 1925, with Ahin Babu as Jatin, Tincowrie Babu as Doctor, Kumar Kanakendra as Akhil, Susila as Mashi, and Niharbala as Himi.

"Rishirmeya" of Dr. Naresh Chandra Sen was staged on December 25, 1925 with Durgadas Banerjee as Charu Dutta, Ahindra Babu as Agnibarna, Radhika Babu as Apastamba, Sushila Sundari as Sasmati, Rani Sundari as Sreelakha and Nihar as Sudatta.

Both in 1925 * & 1926, one great enjoyment was the appearance of Dani Babu as Gadadhar in *Sarala* supported by Tincowrie Babu

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* In April 1925, a part of the company went to Rangoon and showed some performances there. A few artists went there amongst whom Durgadas Banerjee, Nihar, Nibhanoni and Radbacharan's name are worthy of mention. Ahin Babu also went for a few days.

and Nirmalendu Babu as the brothers Sashi and Bidhu, Rani Sundari and Krishnabhamini as their wives and Ascharja as Syama.

In 1926, the following new performances need mention :—

May 15—Srikrishna * (Aparesh Mukherjee).

July 7—Lak Taka (Sourindra Mukherjee).

Attorney — Ahindra Choudhury, Fakkaram—Radhikanonda, Bhujongini — Nihar, Chanchal—Sushila, Khandarni—Rani, Beakkel—Santosh (Bhulu).

July 20—Sodh-Bodh (Rabindra Nath).

Satish—Ahindra Choudhury, Mr. Nundy—Radhika Babu, Mr. Lahiri—Kumar Kanakendra, Nelly—Nihar, Sukumari—Sushila, Charubala—Sareswati.

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* Tincourie Babu gave a very smart representation of Srikrishna. As to Mr. Surendra Nath Ghosh, the lovers of the histrionic art were longing to see him in a new role from a long time and the audience were simply charmed with his masterly representation of the character (Bhisma) Mr. Ahin Choudhury as Durjodhan ably represented his part and so did Radhikananda Mukherjee as Sishupal. Mr. Durgaprasanna Bose as Basudeb was splendid and Mr. Brojendra Sarkar gave a short representation of of the charactor of Drona. Miss Sushila Sundari had another feather added to her crest in the role of Prapti and Miss Niharbala moved the audience with her sweet sonorous songs. *Forward* 23-5-26.

Pandoba Gouraba was revived with Dani Babu as Bheem, Sushila as Subhadra.

Nov. 10--"Dwande Matanam"—a humourous farce of Amrita Lal Bose with Kanak Babu, Ahin Babu, Tincowrie Babu and Nandorani as Karalimama, Baj Bahadoor, Naba and Hindustani Zenana respectively. The well-known actress Kumudini appeared for the last time in this piece. Soon after, she died of Cancer.

Chandidas was a good drama and the parts were acted very well. It was staged on December 25, 1926 with the following cast :—

Chandidas—Tincowrie Babu, Durlav — Radhika Babu, Sucheet Sing—Kumar Kanok, Nafarmama—Noni Mullick, Bhutanonda—Profulla Sen, Sontosh Sinha Nakul, Haradhon — Santosh Das, Rami — Niharbala, Champa—Saraswati, Nitya—Sushila (Jr.)

In 1927 (September, 10) Rabindra Nath's *Paritran* was staged with Tincowrie Babu as Dhananjoy and "*Mager Muluk*" was staged on December 3, 1927 with Tincowrie Babu as Shashuja, Neehar as Gulbanu, Nibhanoni as Pearabanu, Naresh Mitra as Narohari, Durga Prosanna as Mirjumla, Profulla Sen as Aurongzeb and Durgadas Banerjee as Mohammed.

The Art Theatre showed some performances on the Monomohan stage also—"Ramayon" on July 1, 1927, and "Chand Soudagar" on September, 14, Ahindra appearing in the main role, and the part of Behula being taken by Niharbala.

Dani Babu left towards the close of the year 1927. Monmotho Roy's *Debashoor* was staged on April 28, 1928 with Ahindra Babu as Brittra. Protapaditya was staged during X'mas. Tarasundari joined the Star Theatre and appeared as Viswashawri in *Rama* staged on 5th August, 1928. Her dignity added to the character very fittingly. She was here for a short time.

Fullara and *Rajani* were staged on October 20 and were done well with Aparesh Babu as Ramsaday, Ahin Babu as Kalketu and Amarnath, Monoranjan Bhattacharjee as Bhandu Dutt and Hiralal and Nihar as Fullara and Labangalata, Santabala as Chandi and Susila (jr.) as Rajani.

Mantra-Sakti was another brilliant piece for "Art Theatre" and gave it much money. It was rendered into a drama by Aparesh Babu from Sreejukta Anurupa Devi's powerful novel and staged on November 23, 1929 with the following cast :—

Mriganka — Ahindra Babu, Ramaballav— Kunja Chakrabarty, Ambar—Indu Mukherjee, Adyanath—Naresh Ghosh, Poran — Tulsi Chakravorty, Bani—Krishnabhamini, Krishnapriya—Kusum Kumari, Abja—Susilabala (Jr.), Mothro—Tincowrie Babu, Jahura—Rajlaksmi, Tulsi—Subashini.

All the parts were rendered well, and those of Mothro, Ambar, Bani and Mriganka deserve special mention. The last part was done subsequently by Handu Babu, Sisir Babu, Durgadas Babu and others. On some occassions Durga Das Babu appeared to be interesting.

The renowned dramatist and Manager Natyacharya Amrita Lal Bose, one of the proprietors of the Star Theatre who even a few days ago appeared here as Behari Khuro passed away on July 2-1929. With his death, Bengal loses a great personality who was next only to Girish Babu in his relation to the National Stage.

In 1929, when Natya Mandir at the Cornwallis stage was closed, Mr. Bhaduri for some months joined the Art Theatre Limited appearing sometimes as Chandra, sometimes as Mriganka, etc. In September 1930 while still in the employ of Art Theatre, he left for America.

Art Theatre was now losing in reputation and the Company too could not make much headway. But the situation thoroughly changed when Dani Babu's services were secured on a high salary. In the meantime Sakuntala was staged on October 30, 1930, with Tincowrie Babu as Kanwa, Durgadas as Dusmanta, Sushila Bala (jr.) as Sakuntala, Kusum as Goutama and Tulsi Banerjee as Vidushaka.

In 1931, September 18, Aparesh Chandra's *Srigouranga* * was staged with Dani Babu—in the dual roles of Ramananda and Chapal Gopal and Tincowrie Babu as the name-hero.

The part of Chapal Gopal was serio-comic and the character ultimately bursts into devotion. *Liberty* as to the representation, writes thus on 27-9-31 :—

"Dani Babu has astonished us by appearing in a dual role. His rendering of Chapal Gopal proves, if any proof is necessary, that he is not to be beaten even in this old age."

Miss Krishna Bhamini's acting also in the role of Bishnoopriya was superb *Liberty* thus expressed—"Krishna Bhamini is her usual-self as Bishnupriya. The sincerity of her voice touches every heart and everyone in the audatorium shares in her suffering. She has run away with the best acting honours of Srigou-

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* Souren Mukherjee's "Sayambara" was staged on June 27, 1931, with Tulsi Banerjee as Satyaban and Krishna Bhamini as Sabitri, Durgadas Banerjee as Yama and Tincowri Chakrabarty as Dwoomat Sen, Kusum Kumari—Saibya and wood cutter—Santosh Das (Biscuit Kheko Bhulu).

Dani Babu was again taken to the Art Theatre, after the Monomohon Theatre was closed.

ranga. Udhwarini too was ably rendered by Santabala and Baramukhi by Saraswati."

But the most glorious and prosperous days of the Art Theatre Limited were in March 1932 when *Poshyaputra* (dramatised very cleverly and artistically by Aparesh Babu from Srijukta Anurupa Devi's novel of the name) was put on boards on the 12th of the said month. It is one of the best performances ever acted on the Bengali Stage since its establishment, and the novelist, dramatist and the principal actor, with all his associate-artists, deserve to be congratulated for having contributed to the greatest success of the play.

It is the only play like Girish Chandra's "Balidan" where all the parts were free from the least defect, and above all Dani Babu made such rare exhibition of talents that those who saw him playing the part could not say if he was any inferior even to his father—the greatest actor of the Indian Stage. The author of the dramatic piece—Babu Aparesh Chandra used to call it as rare as the lunar eclipse at Benares, the most sacred place of India. The cast was as follows :—

Shyamakanta—Dani Babu, Rajaninath—Monoranjan Bhattacharjee, Baikuntha—Tulsi Chakravarty, Binode—Jivan Gangulee, Hemendra—Santosh Sinha,

Jogen—Indu Mukherjee, Phatik—Jahar Gangulee Nanda—Suren Roy, Thieves—Subal Ghose, Ashu Bose, Sidheshwari — Santabala, Sivani—Krishnabhamini, Santi—Susilabala (jr.), Jogen's wife—Angur Bala, Takia Hari—Rajlakshmi.

The present author after seeing the performance wrote a contemporaneous review of the piece which appeared on the 27th March 1932 in the Amrita Bazar Patrika. While reproducing it in the following lines he now finds that in most of the cases what he wrote fell short of the actuality which was indeed so unique. The omission was all the more regrettable in the cases of Rajani Nath who really was very natural and of Jogen who, too, was full of ease and grace. The review runs thus :—

"POSHYA PUTRA".

(Hemendranath Dass Gupta, author of Girish)

"When something appears in print about the stage, or the screen, the reader generally takes that with a grain of salt ; the fault is not his, but it is often due to the obliging spirit with which the review is written. At the very outset we want to guard ourselves against such a charge referred above.

On Saturday last, we had been to the Star Theatre to witness the performance of "Poshya Putra"—a dramatic adaptation of a society-sketch by Srijukta Anurupa Devi—the distinguished novelist of Bengal.

"It is first of all, gratifying to note that we have powerful writers amongst the Bengali ladies, who in their ability and art are not less distinguished than their renowned sisters in European literature, and surely Srijukta Anurupa Devi is one of them. Yet a fiction is not a drama,—though it may abound in dramatic elements. The function of a dramatist is different from that of a novelist. The dramatist has to work under certain limitations and restrictions which are absent in the case of a pure romanticist, and it requires no small skill to change a narration into a compact drama. In the present case under review the dramatisation is complete, and our thanks are due to Babu Aparesh Chandra Mukherjee, the veteran writer of the stage. Aparesh Babu has given a new setting and thereby a new air to the whole story. It teems with life and beauty. In his present performance Aparesh Babu can fairly take his stand even with the famous adaptors of the Engliah Stage. The success of the performance is entirely due to his dramatic art that has adroitly woven the complex events of the fiction into a moving tale of pathos and beauty. To speak the truth, after a long time we found a genuine social drama on the stage.

The story of the book is not unnecessarily complicated like the present ones that one generally comes across in modern fictions, which sanction all sorts of absurdities and libidinous effusions under the imposing name of Psychology.

Shamakanta—a good-natured Zaminder wants to marry his son Benode to Shanti, the daughter of his early friend—Rajani.

"Benode refuses to accede to his father's request as he intends to go to England for studies. Naturally the father feels irritated and the son leaves the protection of his father. Several incidents combine together to lead Benode to Brindaban where he falls ill and is nursed by Shibani, the virtuous daughter of a selfish virago named Sidheswari. After some time there occurs a rupture between the husband and the wife and Benode leaves Brindabon in disgust. Shamakanta in the meantime thinks his son dead, as a dead man is recovered with Benode's coat and chain. The penitent father then adopts Hemendra as his son, whom he married, to Shanti. Hemendra falls in bad company. Shanti is reduced to straits. Shibani is leading the life of a widow and comes to Shamakanta with a posthumous son of Benode. Shamakanta receives her warmly and is beside himself with joy at the sight of the young boy that reminds him of his own son—Benode. The party labours under a delusion for a long time, then at last the parties are reconciled to one another. Both Hemendra and Benode prove sons affectionate to Shama Kanta. This broad outline of the story is filled with hundreds of amusing and interesting details that help to develop each character and dramatic beauty of the story.

"Now, we must speak about the performance itself. As we have already outstepped our limits, we must be very brief. Dani Babu, (S. N. Ghose) acted the part of Shamakanta. It is indeed a treat to see that old veteran in his elements again, as if he has got back his youthful fire. Age seems to have no effect upon the great actor. He reminded us often of his

illustrious father, Girish Chandra Ghose, the greatest actor and the father of the Bengali Stage. One may exclaim "a chip of the old block". Such presentations of complex emotions in the stage without affectation or undue straining are to be seldom met with, be it on the English or the Bengali Stage—as when he heard of his son's death and again notices the exact likeness of his son in Shibani's child and when at last he recognises his own son Benode. All other characters have acquitted themselvs well. But the characters of Benode, Rajani and Baikuntha deserve special mention. But the whole humour of the piece is centred in Fatikchand. The juvenile actor Mr. Gangulee appeared in the role and he took the whole house by storm by his humourous acting. It may not be high comic but has nothing of the usual vulgar or profane air that is, unfortunately, so abundantly common on the Bengali stage to provoke mirth amongst people of low tastes. It is a relief that we can laugh and feel ourselves merry without a blush on our cheeks.

"The female characters were well represented, specially that of Shibani, Sidheswari, Shantilata, Harimati and Chanduri. Krishnabhamini as usual was at her best in the pathetic character of Shibani. Her histrionic talents are beyond any dispute and Sushilabala in the character of Shanti has also kept up her tradition as an actress of merit specially in her gentle and tender sentiments. This in brief is the impression that the play has created in us. The theatre-going public will have a rare treat so long the show is presented on the stage. Aparesh Babu deserves our thanks for providing the public with a piece of brilliant dramatic entertainment."

The growing success of "Posyaputra" was, however, attended with misfortunes beyond human comprehension.

Dani Babu soon fell ill and the company was faced with a dangerous situation. Such superb was his acting and so great the public appreciation that for all days he was on the stage in this character, the sales were gradually on the increase and on the last Sunday he appeared even with illness, the sales rose to Rs. 2,600/-. But henceforth it became impossible for him to appear any more after the 27th night, and there was none who could reconcile the audience to the loftiest standard of Dani Babu's representation.

He did not recover and on the 28th November 1932* the most powerful and popular actor of Bengal during the last twenty seven years who not for a moment fiddled with the stage breathed his last at Calcutta, to the great mortification, and loss of Aparesh Babu, the directors, the artists and above all, the whole Bengali audience past and present.

Illness followed illness. Death followed death. The celebrated actress Krishnabhamini too, the

* Bidrohini a new piece was being played from November 5 1932 at the Star. Rani—Saraswati, Tonka—Monoronjan, Lingchoo—Ashu Bose.

next best to Dani Babu in Poshyaputra fell ill never to recover. Her death in June 1933 aggravated the tragic situation and the climax came when Aparesh Babu the Manager, master and dramatist too, suffering a cruel disease for a long time from early 1933 followed the two in June 1934. The loss of the Art Theatre was incurable and the company thought it best to go into voluntary liquidation.

"Manamayi Girl's School" was a very interesting piece, and mirth was highly enjoyable without having any thing of indecency though two teachers (one male and another female) had to stay even in the same room. The piece came from the pen of a budding writer Rabindra Maitra whose loss we deeply mourn, and was staged on Dec. 30, 1932, with the following cast—

Niharika—Padmabati, Monoj—Jahar Gangulee, Rajen—Indubabu, Zemindar—Noni Gopal Mullick, Manamayi (his wife)—Sarat Sundari.

Manamayi was preceded by Dr. Naresh Sen's "Barabou" (adapted from his story "Pagal") staged on December 24, 1932 with Jahar Gangulee as Habu (Satyendra) Jivan as Surendra. The supporting cast was :—

Monoronjan—Zamindar Jogen, Hariharanonda—Lalit Mitra, Barabou—Saraswati, (Narayani*) Hemetala—Susilabala.

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* It first appeared as "Narayani" in the monthly paper "Kalikalam".

This promising actress Saraswati was also cut off soon. Ahin Babu who had been at Minerva now joined the Art Theatre and appeared for the first time on March 11, 1933, as Symakanta in Poshyaputra. But nothing could save the Theatre.

The Art Theatre Co. was a limited concern with directors of considerable means and none cared much for the loss or gain. But this much is to be admitted that they served the public to their best capacity and produced on their stage all good and available dramas with best talents from time to time.

Mandir Prabesh by Jaladhar was the last piece staged here from May 27, 1933 with Ahin Choudhuri as Raseek and Manoronjan as Lokenath taking up the cause of the Harijans.

After that the artists of Star and Natya Mandir combined to stage "Sorashi" and other pieces. Rabindranath's "*Baikunther Khata*" was staged with Ahindra as Baikuntha.

Abhimanini was staged on December 25, 1933. Shishir Bhaduri took a part.

There were cases at the High Court and an official Receiver in the person of Mr. Kanti Mukherjee, solicitor, was appointed. As this gentleman was a great friend of Mr. Bhaduri, the latter took lease from him.

Next year Mr. Bhadury opened at the Star Stage his "Nava Natya Mandir" and staged *Birajbou* * on 28th July 1934 and *Sarama* on the 27th September, with himself as Ravan and Kanka as Mandodari, Prabha as Sita, Ranibala as Sarama, Biswanath as Rama, Sailen Choudhury as Bibheesan, Kanu Banerjee as Tarani Sen.

Sachin Sen's *Dasher Dabi* was staged on November 24, 1934 with Shishir Bhaduri as large-hearted Dayal, Biswanath as poet Nisha Nath, Sailen as Prafulla, Kanka as Sujata Devi, Prabha as Nandini, Sital Pal as Sardar and Santaseel as Sontal.

Bijoya the dramatic version from Babu Sarat Chatterjee's "Datta" was also staged on December 1934 with Mr. Bhaduri as Rashbihari and the sales this time were good. Bijoya continued for nights, but Shyama by Mr. Satyendra Krishna Gupta was a poor show.

Bhaduri however lost his good name owing to his irregular habits and his expressions now and again under the influence of liquor used to

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*** Casting of Biraj Bou as follows :—**

Nilamber—Bhaduri, Pitambar—Probhat Babu, Biraj Bou—Kanka Bati, Mohini—Rani Bala, Sundari —Radharani, Gajan Sannyasbi—Santasheel.

offend audience. Sales began to dwindle and *Riti Mata Natak* staged on December 21, 1935 with masterly skill did not improve matters. Differences between him and the Star proprietors were acute and his position became very unsteady. Feelings became strained and culminated in a case instituted by Mr. Ketan Bose against him which however ended in Bhaduri's triumph. His connection with Star, however ceased for good.

He was showing performances no doubt throughout the year 1936, but no new piece was produced. The only piece staged in December 1936—Rabindra Nath's *Jogajoga* * with himself as Madhusudan proved no success. He was at the Star till the whole of May 1937.

Babu Bimal Pal next took the lease and Babu Rathin Banerjee as producer put on boards Vidyapati (of Rames Goswami) Ayaskanta Bakshis Abhisarika, on Dec. 25, 1937 and Mr. Dhiren Mukherjee's "Aparajita" on December 30, 1937 with the following cast :—

Sibsingh—Ratin Banerjee, Raj Guru—Sibkali, Srinibash—Bhumen Roy, Chitra—Santi Gupta, Mahamaya—Raj Laksmi, Mandakini—Charu Bala, Manjuri—Aruna Das, Lachchmi—Sefalika (Putal).

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* **Bipradas—Sailen Choudhury, Nabin—Kanu Banerjee, Kumudini—Kanka, Matirma—Ranibala, Syama—Patal.**

Kaler Dabi by Sachin Sen Gupta was staged on March 12, 1938 and that was the last play during Mr. Pal's lease.

After this Babu Upendra Kumar Mitra the renowned proprietor of the Minerva Theatre came with his full staff from that board and commenced with Dharma-dwanda (which had opened at Minerva) till the first new piece *Chakradhari* was ready for performance. It was from the pen of Mr. Mahendra Gupta a dramatist of promise and was staged on 3rd June 1938 with the following cast :—

Sambar—Sarat Chatterjee, Mayabati—Miss Light, Prodyumna—Jivan Ganguly.

This was followed by Sudhin Raha's "Banglar Boma" on September 30, and Basudeb (Monilal Banerjee) on 17th December 1938 with Miss Light as Satyabhama. Mr. K. P. Ghosh was in charge of production.

In 1939 the following pieces were put on boards :—

March, 18th—Durga Sree Hari, (Bhupen Banerjee)

May 27—Sonar Bangla (Mohendra Gupta)

September 2—Janhavi—(Bholanath)

November 25—Janani Janmabhumi (Sudhin Raha)

1940 :—

March 16—Sati Tulsi (Mahendra Gupta)

Sarajubala was in the main role with Durgarani as Srirupa

May 19—Uttara (Mahendra Gupta)
Shefalika in the Main role, Jivan Ganguli Ghatotkach, Amal Banerjee—Arjoon.

July 13—Ranjit Singh (Mahendra Gupta)
Ranjit Singh—Jiban Ganguly, Kharg Singh—Amal, Jhindan—Miss Light.

September 28—Ranoda Prosad (Sudhin Raha')
Under K, P. Ghosh's direction, with Amal Banerjee in the main role.

* October 26—Gangabataran (Mahendra Gupta)

Decmber 21—Ushaharan (do) Ban—Jaynarayan Mukerjee, Usha—Miss Light.

1941 .—

April 4—Kamale Kamini (Mohendra Gupta)
Amal—Srimanta, Radha—Usha Devi.

July 10—Brittra Sanhar by Bholanath (Mohendra Gupta—Direction).

September 18—Madan Mohan by Amar Nath Chatterjee, Direction—Mahendra Gupta, Lal Bai—Miss Light, Gopal Singh—Sidhu Ganguly, Bhaskar—Jaynarayan.

1942 ;—

January 24—Rani Bhabani (Mahendra Gupta)
Rani Bhabani—Miss Light, Siraj—Bhupen Chakrabarty, Dayaram — Jaynarain Mukerjee, Mirzafar—Sanat Mukerjee.

April 18—Alakananda (Mahendra Gupta)

July 18—Purir Mandir, (Aswini Ghosh)

October 9—Mahalakshmi (Mahendra Gupta)

1943 :—

January 9—Rani Durgabati (Mahendra Gupta)

February 11—Krishnarjoon—(Barada Das Gupta)

April 22—Sukanya—(Rabi Pande)

June 4—Maharaja Nandkumar (Mahendra Gupta) Nandkumar—Jaynarayan. Clavering—Bhumen Roy, Hastings—Bhupen Chakra, Lutfa—Beena Devi, Kshyama Devi—Nirupama, Moni Begum—Aparna Das.

September 29—Devi Choudhurani dramatised by Mahendra Babu was staged with Bhupen Chakravarty as Brajeswar, Joynarayan Mukerjee as Haraballav, Bepin Gupta as Bhabani Pathak Aparna as Devi and Bina as Sagore.

Befofore the play began, "Bandemataram" song was sung in chorus. There was great enthusiasm sensation in the opening right.

Durgesh Nandini rendered into drama by Mahendra Gupta was staged on December 22, 1943. The performance was enjoyable and scenic arrangement with representations on two floors on the stage was good and marked a novel improvement. The cast was as follows—

Jagatsing—Sindhu Ganguli, Osman—Bhumen Roy Birendra Sing—Bepin Gupta, Bhupen Chak—Diggaj, Bemala—Aparna, Ayesha—Usha Devi, Tottama—Bina, Katalukhan—Joynarain.

On the 19th May 1944 Mahendra Gupta's Tipu Sultan was put on boards with Bepin Gupta in the main role. The supporting cast was as follows :—

Haidarali—Rabi Roy, Monsiur Lally—Bhumen Roy, Cornwallis—Jaynarayan Mukerjee, Nana Farnavis—Bhupen Chakravarty, Wellesly—Malcolm, Nizam—Panchanan Banerjee, Karim Shada—Sidhu Ganguli, Krishnabai—Aparna, Sophia—Beena, Runi Begum—Uma Devi (afterwards Sefalika).

The Star Theatre is maintaning its traditions. As we have seen, it began in 1888 with Nashiram at its present site, not to speak of Dakshyana in 1883 in Beadon Street, and since then it has passed through different hands and is now being managed by Babu Upendra Kumar Mitra assisted by his son Salil Babu.

The days of Nashiram and Kalapahar, Profulla and Mayabashan are things of the past, even Pratapaditya, Rana Pratap, Mirkasim and Nanda Kumar need not be recalled, Khasdakhal, Karnarjoon, Chandidas and Poshyaputra may also be forgotten, but the fact should not be denied that Star Theatre is the solitary example that still cherishes and times to follow the glorious memory of the old. It is no longer a cheap theatre and is, I am sure trying its best to proceed on the right lines.

Not only scenic improvements are being gradually achieved, but the general acting also has became more efficient. Mr. Mohendra Gupta is the dramatist and in charge of direction who has within a short space of time produced a number of national dramas— Ranajit Singh, Rani Bhabani, Nanda Kumar, Devi Chowdhury and Tipoo Sultan. The present writer does not intend to lay stress on the merits or demerits of the modern dramas of writers most of whom are living and his friends, but this much is certain that the Star Theatre is sparing no pains and money to produce such dramatic pieces as will have the tendency to raise the moral tone and dignity of the Stage. We offer our congratulations to Messrs Mitra (the father and the son) and also to Mr. Gupta and hope they will go on, as best as possible, in ennobling the tastes of the audienee and increasing the moral tone of the people of Bengal on the model of Girish Chandra and his worthy disciples who were so long the proprietors of the very Star Theatre they are in charge of now.

CHAPTER IX

THE ENGLISH THEATRES OF CALCUTTA.

In the first volume of the Indian Stage we have dealt with, in detail, the Play House, the Calcutta Theatre, Chowringhee Theatre and Sansouci Theatre managed by the Early English settlers of Calcutta, for about a century and have shown how these Play-Houses greatly influenced the later growth of the Bengali Stage. No doubt both Drama and Stage of India are of purely Indian origin, but the apathy of the rulers for theatrical entertainments during the Moslem rule set it greatly back. With the advent of the British settlers, however, who brought with them their national institutions and customs, the Bengali Stage was revived after centuries' stupor.

In truth, Lehedeff's Bengali Theatre of 1795 at 25, Domtolla was the fruit of the direct inspiration from the Calcutta Theatre (1776—1808) and Babu Prasanna Kumar Tagore's Hindu Theatre (1831) and Nabin Krishna Bose's Bengali Theatre at Shambazar (1832) owe their

incentives to the Chowringhee Theatre (1813—1839). The Sansouci Theatre (1839—1849) also exerted a great influence upon the Bengali students during the middle of the 19th century, and its actors used to train the corps of the Oriental Theatre, some prominent members of which subsequently staged the first genuine Bengali Drama *Kulin Kula Sarvaswa Nataka* by Pandit Ramnarain Tarkaratna in 1856 at the house of Joyram Bysak at Tagore Castle Road.

The Great National Theatre, the first permanent stage of Bangal with which Girish Chandra was associated for years, was also built after the model of the Lewis Theatre at the Maidan, conducted by Mrs. Lewis from 1872-76 We have also seen how Miss Fanny Anson's Galatia served as a model to Binodini's Sahana in *Mohini Pratima* in 1881.

The Bengali stage after this, grew independently and became itself a glorious institution. It required no outside help or inspiration and became complete by itself, and by the time two British actors Matheson Lang and Allan Wilkie, both of London celebrity came to Calcutta in 1911,—when Girish was in death-bed and Ardhendu Sekhar, Mohendra Bose, Amrita Mitra were long dead,—even then—Dani Babu

and Amarendra Nath Dutt appeared to impartial observes in no way inferior to their English compeers.

After Mrs. Lewis left, there was no permanent English theatrical party, although there were Opera House, Theatre Royal and Corinthian Theatre but they were meant for casual performances or musical entertainments only. Except a few solitary instances, dramatic pieces too were either light comedies or farces which could not approach the high standard of comic representations where Ardhendu Sekhar or Bel Babu, Khetromoni or Binodini were the rival artists. History, however, requires that our readers should be informed about occassional dramatic entertainments arranged in Calcutta by some European Companies from time to time.

Five or six years after Mrs. Lewis left the shores of India, Herr Bandmann came with his party in January 1882, and showed some performances for two or three years at the Theatre Royal, amongst which Hamlet, Macbeth * East Lynne, Romeo Juliet, Richard III and Othello or the Moor of Venice were the most note-worthy. In the last piece staged on January 28, Herr Bandmann was in the role of

* Vide page 69, vol. III, Indian Stage.

Othello, D. Orsay Odgen in that of Iago, D. Newton of Cassio and Miss Louis Beaudot that of Desdemona.

Next came to Pollard's Lilliputian Opera Company which showed some performances for some years (1896—99) at the Opera House, Calcutta, viz., the Mikado (Gilbert and Suliivant's masterpiece) Lamascott, Robinson Crusoe, The Pirates of Penzance etc.

About the same time the Brough Comedy Company under the dination of Mr. Brough also showed some performances at the Theatre Royal viz. the Dandy Dick, Nisbe, A village Priest, Sowing the wind etc. The artists were Mr. Brough, Mr. Plimmer, Mr. Roberts, Mr. Shine, Miss Temple, Miss Wall, Miss Hardy and Mrs. Brough. In the "Advanture of Lady Ursula" by Anthony Pope, Mrs. Brough played the part of Lady Ursula Barrington, Mr. Brough that of Rev. Dr. Blimboe. This was also from 1896 and onwards.

Oscar Wilde's plays"An Ideal husband" "Salome" and "The Importance of Being Earnest" were performed by Nancy & Co. "Alibaba" shown in July 1896, here, was followed by Amazon and 'Fedora'.

A few other companies, viz, The Amateur Dramatic Society, Eclipse, Variety company, the

Janet Waldorf Company, the Hudson's Dramatic Company etc. showed some performances at either of the two Theaters. Then again "Camille" (with Miss Janet as Camillee), the Mummy, Robin Hood and last though not the least "The Sign of the Cross" and Shakespeare's "As you like it" by Henry Dallas's South African Dramatic Company, which opened on Dec. 24, 1898 at the Corinthian Theatre deserve also mention. Mr. Dallas's Tweedle Punch in Queen Hall's "Florodora" was interesting, and "San Toy" too was staged by his company.

In 1900, again, the Bandmann & Co. under the management of Mr. Maurice E. Bandmann, arrived in Calcutta with 50 artists and staged at the Corinthian Stage,—"Florodora" on Dec. 22, as it had been performed at the Lyric Theatre London. They also played "Little Cristopher Columbus." "Cingalee",—"La Poupee" and other pieces. After showing some performances, they left Calcutta and came back in 1905.

In the meantime, other companies also showed performances at Calcutta. Of those, Wilson Barrets "Sign of the Cross" on Oct. 3, 1903, and "Castle" (J. W. Roberson's) on Oct. 17, with Miss Vivian Dagmer as Esther Eccles

and Anny Sherar as Polly Eccles are worth-mentioning. "East Lynne" by Fanny Stanby's Opera Company with Miss Fanny Stanby as Lady Isabel and Madame Vine was also acted with success.

Mr. Bandmann with his Opera company after a long tour and direct from Khedive Opera House, Egypt, came again to Calcutta and commencing from June 22, 1905 entertained the English people mostly with "A country Girl" "The Talk of the Town" "by Lady Molly", "The Cingalee" "The Geisha" anh "Orchid" etc. after which he left for his far-eastern tour.

Now in absence of Mr. Bandmann, the Lyric Opera Company, with Mr. Fred Ellis as manager, arrived in Calcutta and showed amongst other pieces, Cingalee, Orchid (with Mr. Ellis as Miakin) and advertised a representation of "The Geisha" for July 5th to 9th 1906. Now, these were the self-same pieces of which Mr. Bandmann was the sole licensee, the exclusive rights being obtained from George Edwards of Daly's Theatre London, for British India and Far East. A warning was given by Mr. Bandmann from Singapore where he was then on tour, but Ellis insisted on acting these pieces. Bandmann had no alternative but to pray before

the High Court for an injunction and Mr. Justice Bodily granted it on July 4, 1906.

Mr. Bandmann embarked on Sept. 12, 1906 for London, after having toured in China. Singapur, Ceylon and other places. Before he left he had some trouble with an actress of the name of Miss Caird. The girl produced medical certificates from some Rangoon physicians that she suffered from Tubercular complaints and wanted to be immediately released. It appeared some persons were fomenting the trouble from behind. Mr. Bandmann wanted the girl to accompany the party and did not brook outside dictation. There was much controversy going on through newspapers, and Miss Carid refused to acompany the rest of the company, although a direct passage to home was offered to her. Her case was that Mr. Bandmann refused to help her saying 'no work, no pay.' Mr. Bandmann's case was that he was paying all her charges, although she was not working. Miss Caird, however got help from some persons in Calcutta and then she left. Mr. Bandmann returned in 1909, and showed some performances at the Empire Theatre when "The Arcadians, 'Our Miss 'Gibbs,' 'Butterflies" & were put on boards. Miss Connie Leon who joined his company made her first appearence on Nov. 13, 1909.

Another company—"The English Comedy Company" showed some performances at the Opera House in Nov. & Dec. 1909 and under the direction of the popular actor Mr. Sydney T. Pearse, staged "The Sceptre and the Cross", "For the King" and Bernard Shaws' Play "Arms and the Man" on Dec. 20, "Mrs. Dane's Defence" and "A Marriage of Convenience". The party then left on Dec. 28, 1909 en route to Bombay, Ceylon, Japan and Phillipines.

Mr. Bandmann next scored a great success by inviting the well-known Shakespearian actor and manager Mr. Matheson Lang and his co-adjutor Miss Hutin Britton. Sometime before, in 1909, he had also brought Charles Vane to play in different characters of Shakespeare and through the efforts of Mr. Probodh Chandra Guha, a performance at the Star Theatre was also arranged. Now Mr. Lang's productions of Hamlet and Romeo Juliet at the Lyceum, London, were still fresh in the memory of many theatre-goers and he was highly appreciated for showing some performances at the Empire Theatre, Calcutta—on December 6 and 7, 1911, Taming of the Shrew, 11th Hamlet, Bardley's the Magnificent and the Farewell performance of Taming of the Shrew on December 30, 1911. Mr. Lang appeared as Hamlet, Petruchio etc. and

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Miss Britton as Ophelia and Catherina. In 'Hamlet', Charles Vane now with them, was in the role of Polenius.

About the same time, another well-known Shakespearian actor Mr. Allan Wilkie of the London Repertory Co, accompanied by Miss Frediswyde Hunter-Watts entertained the Calcutta audience from the boards of the Opera House by showing performances of The Cardinal (Parker's) on the 5th December, 1911, Othello on the 6th, Romeo Juliet on the 7th and Hamlet on the 9th, Julius Ceaser on the 16th, Merry Wives of Windsor, The School for Scandal, Twelvth Night, She stoops to conquer, David Garrick, Taming of the Shrew and Rob Roy. Both Wilkie and Miss Watts appeared in leading roles.

Wilkie was Falstaff in Merry Wives of Windsor. In Merchant of Venice Wilkie as Shylock "at once kept the audience spell-bound with admiration and held their attention without the least slackening, and his dramatic final exit was superb" (Englishman). Portia too as represented by Miss Watts was attended with great success.

Both Lang and Wilkie after a few months again entertained the public at the Empire,

Lang in April and May 1912, staging Much Ado About Nothing, Taming of the Shrew, Hamlet, Sweet Nell of old Drury, and Wilkie two months after in July staging Salome (Herod—Wilkie, Salome—Watts), Sign of the Cross on 9th July (Marcus Superbus—Wilkie, Mercia—Watts), the Liar's, and Sir Cristophar Dearing (Wilkie in the name-role). Mr, Wilkie showed one or two performances from the Kohinoor Stage also for the Bengali audience.

Lang and Wilkie appeared for the second time after Girish Chandra was dead and how far our new set of actors got inspiration from them is a matter of guess. As to Mr. Lang, a great actor indeed, those who had no opportunity to see him on the stage, saw him times out of number on the screen in some pictures, the most note-worthy of which was "The Great Defender" where his representation as the counsel was simply superb.

Next, in 1914 Mr. Bandmann arranged performance of 'A Doll's House' (Ibsen) on Feb 2, at Theatre Royal, (Madame Dagmer appearing in the role of Nora and Mr. Meiffre her husband Torvald Helmer) in the presence of Lady Carmaichael. Another popular Company "The Charles Howitt and A. Phillips Company"

came from London and showed some performances at the Grand Opera House opening with "Raffles" on the 28th March 1914. Mr. Howitt was the principal actor and director and Miss Gertrude Godart, the principal actress. Miss Phillips and a few others were also in the party. Mrs. Phillips was the business-manager. Master Phillips also had often to appear as a young child. The following pieces followed "Raffles"—No Body's daughter, Diana of Dobsons (Miss Godart as Diana), Why Smith Left Home (Smith-Howitt), East Lynne, When Knights were Bold (Sir Guy de. Vere-Howitt), and in Belladona on the farewell night April 22, Miss Godart was in the main role.

Mr. Howitt's acting was restrained and was liked by the audience. All the same whether he could bear comparision with the famous Bengali artists of his time, is a matter of controversy, which we should better avoid. He was friendly with Bengali actors specially Mr. Amarendranath Dutt.

Mr. Howitt also came in 1918 and showed Merchant of Venice, The Prince and the Beggar Maid, Story of the Rosary etc.

Mr, Srish Chandra Bose Bar-at-Law and a dramatist both in English and Bengali staged

his own piece "Buddha" in May 1918 at Theatre Royal, himself being in the main role with Mr. James Herbert, the producer, as Charioteer and Suzanne as Gopa. A few months after, on Dec. 22, 1918, Mr. Bose's "Nala Damayanti" was staged and on this,'The Englishman' wrote,"Mr. Bose as Nala and Suzanne as Damayanti were exceedingly good, and both acted their parts with great conviction."

In May 1918, Charles Harding, another Shakespearian actor, though not of great reputation, appeared as Cardinal Wolsey on the 19th May, Richard III on the 20th, and Shylock on the 22nd in Calcutta.

Besides this, we have no doubt heard of companies showing performances here, but would only mention one of Mr. Pemberton Willard. He showed some performances and when he left, his brother remained in Calcutta apparently in partnership with Mrs. Dave Carson, wife of the comic star of India. The present chapter would, however, remain incomplete, if we do not mention with pleasure the praiseworthy endeavours of a few British civilians of Calcutta who, for the entertainment of the large number of military men who have to stay away from home to fight the enemy, have formed themselves along with the co-operation of the members of the Army

and R. A. F. into an association known as B. E. S. A.—Bengal Entertainment Services Association. This body, formed under the presidency of Lady Mary Herbert, has been arranging nine performances every week at 30, Park Street, at the Lecture Hall of the St. Xavier's College. All our readers know that the Sansouci Theatre was situated at this place and it has still the association of a Theatre, and is known as the B. E. S. A. Theatre. The Lecture Hall of the college is ideal as a theatre which is wide enough to accommodate about 450 persons (22 rows, each one with 20 chairs). It is a spacious hall and has been secured from the College authorities by the above association for the entertainment of the soldiers who have to pay only annas 8, as entry fee. They are allowed also each to take a companion with them, but civilians or officers have to pay Rs. 2-8 for a seat. Major J. S. Graham is the business manager of B. E. S. A. and Sergt. Newell is the house-manager.

The amateur artists who have appeared in B. E. S. A. performances give their time and services entirely free, and in most cases, come from well-known Calcutta families.

B. E. S. A. opened on the 14th Aug. 1942 with "*Besabuzzin*" and has staged nearly a hundred plays (too many to name them) up till

now, including three pieces of Bernard Shaw's—"Candida," "The Doctor's Dilemma" and "Pygmalion." Attached to this are also ten touring Companies which have travelled 15000 miles every six months in the past and have given performances in different camps and places of Eastern India for similar entertainment of members of the Army, Navy and Air Forces.

In 'Pygmalion' which was staged on the 7th Aug. 1944, under the production of Ian Valentine, Richard O' Donoghue appeared as Higgins, Patrick Parsons as Doolittle, Jacqueline Cunningham as Eliza, Gracia Cohane, Millicent Owers, Patricia Dearden, Jae Mair, Richard Holmes, Paul Hanbury, Reginald Lee and others.

Dr. Rabindra Nath Tagore's Dance-Comedy "Balmiki Prativa" was allowed to be staged on the 3rd and 4th April 1944, in Bengali by the students and staff of Santi Niketan.

Through the courtesy of E.N.S.A.—Entertainment National Services Association,—prominent persons attached to the English Stage, have often come to the shores of India to entertain the members of the Services. Noted amongst them are Mr. Stainless Stephen who appeared with "Whoopee" on Feb. 23, 1944, Miss Vera Lynn on April 15, and last but not least, Mr. Noel Coward, the actor and dramatist, and an outstanding genius connected both with stage and

screen, who appeared on July 8, and was in the Far East for more than ten weeks. During his stay in Calcutta, he was a guest of H. E. the Governor of Bengal. On the 7th July he entertained a packed house at the New Empire with witty songs, sale-proceeds going to the Welfare Funds.

The anniversary performance on Aug. 14, 1944 was "Besa Birthday" and the guest on the occasion was Andy Gemmell.

Of late, B. E. S. A.'s management has merged into E. N. S. A. and become E. N. S. A.'s chief production centre in India and Burma. Since the change over, a new musical comedy "Music Hath Charms" has been the first full E N.S.A. production staged on October 30, 1944. It combines talent from both organisations, including Beryl Templeman, Pamela Parker, Gaby Rosine, Richard King and others. Major J. E. Hawkins, E. N. S. A.'s second in command in India, intends also to include attempts at classics and hopes to form in Calcutta a semi-permanent repertory company.

The Earl of Munster, under Secretary of State for India who was on tour for inspection of troops' welfare had paid also a visit to the B. E. S. A. theatre during his stay in Calcutta and made several enquiries about troops' entertainment. Yvette, Ivor Owen and others appeared in BYOYS AHOY on Nov.9, 1944. "HELLO AGAIN" was the next show.

CHAPTER X.

HINDI THEATRES.

Every body knows that Hindi speaking people are by far the largest in India and the views of some people that it should be the *lingua franca* of India are still not past. Ramlila Shows (since the time of the poet and devotee Tulasi Dass) which form chiefly the dialogues between Rama, Sita and others must have given incentives to dramatic performances to all Hindi speaking people. Besides, Theatrical shows (both in Urdu and Hindi) have for a long time been arranged by various Parsee Companies (not less than twenty five) of Bombay some of which toured round the whole of India and staged pieces in different parts. Yet it is a wonder that Hindi Drama has not flourished at all and even today it is still in its infancy.

Bengal which had a considerable portion of the Hindi-knowing people in its jurisdiction upto 1911 (Bihar and Chhotanagpur being included in the presidency) arranged in 1893 a performance of Ramaswamedh (the Hindi version of Girish Chandra's Sitarbonobash) on the boards of the Star Theatre which became very popular.

Yet we do not find a real dramatist till Jaya Sankar Prasad after the great national movement of 1921 came with his dramas Kāmaṇā Natak (in 1927), a symbolical play where the author satirises the modern civilisation and Ek Ghunt. His historical dramas Visakha, Chandragupta and Naga yagya are also laudable attempts, but Prasad's pieces are not fit for the stage,—they seem to be too much lesson-giving and do not represent real feeling's of a man. Its satire is also a bit disgusting. All the same, Mr. Prasad stands foremost amongst dramatists in Hindi. Mr. Govind ballav Pant's Varamala (the wedding garland) derived from Purana had some evidence of stage-craft. Prem Chand's Sangram and Karbala have not been attended with success. Pandit Badrinath Bhatta's pieces more than Satires or farcical comedies, are poor shows and Sribastabaji's farces breathe bad taste *. It is hoped that the Hindi-knowing people should have an ideal stage and with the help of real artists of both sexes should make the stage both a place of amusement and instruction. Much of the ideals of the nationalist leaders may be propagated through a well-developed stage.

* Some help has been received from Mr. Shamsundar Das's well-known "Hindi Literature."

The first Hindi performance is said to have been held in 1868, but details or reality lack confirmation. We shall however make a present of what we have gathered from authoritative sources. 'But we shall do injustice to Hindi drama if we omit to mention about Babu Haris Chandra (1850-1885) of Beneras who wrote a number of dramas including "Haris Chandra" in 1875. The theme narrating the hero's extreme attachment to truth is very popular in Bengal, too, from a long time and Yatra performances have been shown from a long past. Although we have no proof of this drama being performed during the life time of the dramatist, we have evidence that this was a special theme for the Parsee theatres of Bombay. Hindi versions of Prasanna Raghab-Natak by Joybeba, and Ramananda's Jagannath-ballav Natak are also good dramas.

As I said before, The Parsees have made considerable progress in the matter of improvement of the stage and to them alone we should remain grateful for performances in Urdu and Hindi. We have evidence that the Victoria Parsee Opera Company showed performances in Feb. 1882 * at the Corinthian Stage (5 Dhurmotolla Calcutta), and that in 1884, the Parsi Elphin-

* Vide "Englishman" of the time.

stone Dramatic Club of Bombay which was showing performances in Urdu at the same place, staged Nala Damayanti * in Hindi at the special request of the Bengali gentlemen in Feb.

In 1901, the present author had the opportunity of seeing performances in Hindi and Urdu by both the Parsi Elphinstone Dramatic Company and the Parsi Alfred Theatrical Company both of Bombay at Gulzerbag, Patna, and also by the former at the old Anglo-Sanskrit School. Both the companies had artists of both sexes but the former had a large number of boys to dance and some to act parts of the young folk. Scenes were gorgeous especially in the former, and the latter was owned by Mr. K. P. Khatao whose Cassio in Othello in oriental garb was interesting. Elphinstone Company showed among other pieces "Haris Chandra" in which drama purely Hindi words (akin to Bengali) were used, but in Othello and other performances Urdu words seemed to be very difficult. Mr. Khatao was an excellent comic actor and an English actress Miss Mary Fenton was drawn to him for his parts and joined his party.

* Girish Chandra's "Nala Damayanti" was staged at Dec. 15, 1883 at the Star Theatre.

At the Alfred Theatre

Now to Calcutta, in the same year the Parsi Ripon Theatrical Company under the management of Mr. Surveyor showed Kalijuga (Iron-age), Hon-Har, also in 1904 Mansur Pasha and Begai Bagdad and a number of performances at the Curzon Theatre, 91 Harrison Road.

Mr. Khatao with his Alfred Company next showed performances in Calcutta, Burmah and other places and subsequently he made Curzon Theatre the place of his activities and was so much identified with it, that people used to call the place as "Alfred Theatre" after the name of his Theatrical Company.

From 1910 and afterwards Mr. Khatao captured the imagination of the audience with performances of Mahabharata, Ramayan, Bilwamangal, Yuhudi Ki Larki, Patni Pratap, Dhuromjoy besides playing Shakespearian pieces in Oriental Costume. Miss Zernia used to appear as Droupadi, Sita, Chintamoni, Harna respectively in the first four pieces. Miss Putli and Aga Mohomed Shah the principal actor, as Actoriā and Ezra in Yuhudi Ki Larki. Miss Savaria was also another artist. Thus the Khatao Company spared no pains for the Hindi performances to the great pleasure of the

Bengalees and Hindustani people. Mahabharat was specially written for him with use of words purely Hindi. Wehmi Zangi (Othello) was staged October 4, 1917.

In 1917, Mr. J. Cowasji Khatao became the proprieter and was courteous to the Bengalis. The present author has a personal reminiscene how he was much obliged to Mr. Khatao for the courtesy shown to him while a performance of Giris's "Grihalakshmi", was organised hy the East Bengal Club of 12 Bakulbagan Road for relief of the sufferers from Cyclone in 1919, in which he (the present author) was in the leading rule, Kumar Kanakendra in Sailen's, Rai Saheb Haren Lahiri Msc. in Monmotha's Mr. Sham Sankar Choudhury B. E (Berlin) Biroja and Lalit Sen as Tarangini.

No dramatic performance worth name in Hindustani was held after 1922.

At the Corinthian Stage

But the more popular house was the Corinthian Stage where Elphinstone Parsi Theatrical Company showed performances for years.

In 1910, this company staged *Jheri Sanp*.

In 1912. Balliwala's Parsi Victoria Theatre Company of Bombay came and showed some

performances. In Haris Chandra Balliwala appeared as Nakshatra, Miss Bijli as Taramati, Miss Munni as Apsara, Miss Gulab as Kula Kundalini, Mr. H. Tantra as Haris Chandra. In "Santoy Aladin" staged on Jan. 18, 1913, the night previous to the last performance, Santoy was played by Miss Munni, Aladin by Mr. Peshori and Kit Kit by Miss Gulab.

Chaturberg or Mahabharata was also popular. Mr. B. Tantra appeared as Dilsha in Diler Dilsha. In Lailo Nahar, Balliwalla appeared as Khansama Ashroff.

In Dec. 1913 The Parsi Theatrical Company of Bombay and the Elphinstone Theatrical Company combined together and captured imagination of the Bengalis all the more by staging Ramayana, Mahabharata, (specially written for the Company by Pandit Nityabodha Vidyaratna of Bengal) Srikrishna Charitra, Sati Sabitri, Nala Damayanti, Madhur Murali, Beer Balak, Patni Pratap, Dhurbo Charit and other pieces. Miss Gohar was the principal actress and became very popular in all the leading female roles, supported by Master Mohon, a comic actor and a good singer as also by Mr. Dorabji Mehbwalla who had a powerful voice and used to appear as Bilwa

Mangal, Bheem, King Kans, Yama etc. Master Mohan's Srikrishna, Nakshatra (Haris Chandra) and Sobharam in Vir Balaka were pleasing. But above all Miss Gohar's Droupadi, Chintamoni, Taramati (Haris Chandra), and Radhika (in Srikrishna) Lalita (Madhur Murali) were specially interesting. She also played the parts of Sundari in Soubhag Sundari, Akbari in Zeri Sanp, Beatrice in Jan Armit etc.

The other artists were Kaikshrew Adjania, Khursedji Billimoria, Ruttonshah Senor and others. Shakespeare's pieces as Hamlet, Cymbeline, Measure for Measure etc. were also played and a new "Gujrati Play" Fank Do—Phitoori which had a run for over 4 years in Bombay was also put on boards in January 4, 1914 with Miss Gohor as Gool.

In 1918, Dadabhai Sarkari enchanted the audience with his artistic acting. Later he also appeared in a Bengali Cinema Show (silent) of "Profulla", appearing as Jogesh.

As I said scenes and sceneries of the Parsee theatres were very gorgeous. Scenes for the Elphinstone were specially designed and painted by K. Hussain Buksh of Lahore and the great transformation scenes in Bilwa Mangal e. g. when Srikrishna was born from a lotus flower,

His advent on the horizon, but his immediate metamorphosis to a shepherd boy, Chintamoni's vision and Bhagirathi's sudden transformation into a human skeleton were really enchanting. Similar transformation scenes for the first time in Nala Damayanti staged on Dec 22, 1918 and also in other pieces, marked a decided improvement of the Hindi Stage.

By the time these performances were approaching towards perfection, boys were no longer in the Elphinstone. But woe now to the Hindustani stage, no theatre is running in Calcutta, although not less than ten Cinema Houses are catering to people's tastes. The number of Hindi speaking people has increased to such a lengh in Calcutta that two to three properly regulated Boards for Hindi plays would not be quite enough now. Should not there be such a move from people who claim culture so that the tastes of the audience may be more elevated day by day and real national service be done to the country?

CHAPTER XI

THE SOUTH INDIAN STAGE

THE MALABAR STAGE AND DRAMA

The Stage and Drama as they find expression in Malabar * at the present day take two forms. One presents the characteristics that are generally associated with the South Indian stage everywhere. The Stage is a raised platform, specially designed and constructed for the requirements of these performances. It is usually a structural adjunct of public halls or theaters and has the usual assortment of painted decorated curtains which are drawn up as the actors come on the stage. Music, both vocal and instrumental, furnishes an effective background for the speeches, declamations and actions or gestures of the actors. The themes chosen for representation are either striking incidents from the lives of pouranic heroes or stories from real life or more rarely skits or delineations the actors are specially designed for and reflect, as far as possible, the fashions and modes of the age which the story represents. The Malabar stage

* Malabar consists of two districts of Malabar of the Madras Presidency and Cochin and Travancore.

in this form of it does not either in broad outlines or in details of portrayal, differ substantially from the South Indian stage. The only point of defference perhaps is that the medium of speech employed by the actors is *Malayalam*, the language of Malabar. Women of Malabar, freely appear on the stage, in this variety of drama and there are no restrictions, social or otherwise preventing or disapproving of appearance of women on the stage.

2. The second form which the stage and drama take in Malabar is truly more national, or in other words more representative of Kerala culture, than the one described in the previous paragraph. This manifestiation of the Malabar stage in what is popularly known as *Kathakali*, which has now become world-famous. The Kathakali (literally story-play) is in several respects unique. Nothing quite like it exists outside Malabar. It is not wholly correct to call it a dumb show or a Dance-drama various situations entirely by bodily movement, gestures and steps. It is a representation of life, as protrayed in the stories of the Puranas mostly, or in the legendary lore of the Malayalies, through the co-ordinated agency of strides, dances, hand poses or Mudras and facial postures or gestures, in substitution of vocal expression and music,

explanatory of these actions and gestures. The origin of Kathakali is a matter on which opinions are divided. There are some who maintain that it was a development from a variety of drama called *Ramanattam,* which is said to be a creation somewhere towards the middle of the 17th centuary A. D. by Raja Vira Kerala Varmah, a famous prince of *Kottarakkara* in Travancore. Ramanattom, in its turn, is stated to be a variety of Krishnanattom, a variety of drama organised by *Manaveda Raja* of Calicut in *1657* A. D. and modelled on the *Gita Govind of Jaya Deva.* There are others who hold that the Kathakali is an evolution from a mere premitive kind of Dumb show, which was in vogue among the Tamils, when the whole of South India, including Malabar, was ruled by three Tamil Dynasties, known as the Chera, Chola and Pandya Kingdoms. In support of their opinion they point out that dumb shows are mentioned in Chilappathikaram (literally, the lay of the Bracelet), a Tamil classic of this period supposed to be written somewhere about 125 A. D. They advance other reasons too, which it is unnecessary to refer to here, for supposing that the Kathakali is heir to a far greater antiquity than is commonly ascribed to it and that the basic form from which it developed can be taced to the dim period when the Dravidian

people occupied the whole of South India and were the possesors of a civilisation which has excited the admiration of historians, it will not be far wrong to suppose that the Kathakali has got an autochthonous element, springing from the rural life of the country itself, its tradition folklore.

3. One of the most outstanding characteristics of the Malabar stage, as represented by Kathakali, is that it requires no stage at all in the proper sense in the word. It is an open air show and all that is required is a ceremonial oil lamp, with lighted cotton twists to supply the light and a raised canopy supported by poles. A moderately ornamented curtain held in front of the lamp by two peoples at either end screen of the entry of the actors into the stage and is removed when the actors emerge into the view of the audience. In the case of the some characters elaborate rules come into play with respect to the manner in which the curtain has to be dealt with before removal. The orchestra supporting the cast is of the simplest character, but is admirably adapted to the technique of acting. The accompaniments consist of a 'Chenda' (a big drum), a Maddalom Gong (also a drum of piculiar shape), a bell-metal for keeping time, held by the vocalists, who

sing the set pieces in the particular composition which is being enacted on the stage. The dramas which are generally put on the stage are all poetical compositions in Malayalam, with a profuse admixture of Sanskrit, by celebrated Malayalam poets and play-wrights. The subject matter of these plays is for the most part well-known incidents from the lives of heroes and lesser characters from the Hindu Puranas. The plays generally begin during the early hours of night and extend to the early hours of the morning. The music of the songs is, as is now universally acknowledged of a very high order and represents Carnatic music of the purest type free from any admixture of other types or modes of Indian music. The musical pieces are all given an appropriate setting in Hindu Rajas and are astonishingly well-attuned to the emotional atmosphare which pervades the precise incident portrayed.

4. The feature of Kathakali which most appeals to the person who sees it for the first time is the complexity and, in spite of it, the beauty of the facial make-up and the colourful picturesqueness of the dress and ornaments. The make-up artist goes to work on the face of the artist much as a sculpture does on marble. He makes of a man what he likes. He first

encloses the face by painting all along its outer edges a 'Chutti' as it is called, which is a border made by spreading rice paste in small edged in a set methodical fashion. Within the face, he then proceeds to paint, using the colours and patterns which tradition and well established rules laid down as appropriate to the type of character sought to be represented. Those who designed the colours for the facial make-up were evidently aware of the fact that colour has actually a physiological as well as a psychological effect. White, for instance, was the colour employed in the case of the personages with characters marked by great austerity and purity. Light, green and sometimes blue are used for celestial and immortals and heroes and red for unspiritual, male violent characters with easily irritable temper such as demons and Asuras. It is manifastly impossible to deal with the whole range of the art of Make-up in a short article like this. Most of the male characters wear a head dress of some sort or other. In the case of monarchs and Devas or Immortals, the head dress is usually an elaborated ornamented crown of the type usually found in the famous murals in the Palace at Mattancheri (in Cochin) and on the walls of some of the temples in Kerala The female dresses are of a peculiar kind and probably were adaptation from the early patterns

once extant in Kerala. The female characters wear a veil thrown over their head but not hiding the faces. The ladies of Kerala do not take part in Kathakali and the female parts are in the hands of male impersonators

5. The bodily movements accompanying the dances and some of the gestures require great powers of endurance and flexibility of body. These accomplishments in the case of the best exponents of the art are acquired only after a protracted training, begun in early boyhood and lasting for a number of years. There is a whole course of scientific physical culture to be gone through, before the student is adjudged fit to receive training in dances and mudras. The physical instruction is in the hands of expert teachers who are masters in the science of Massage. Elaborate training in Mudras or hand-sign, employed to describe objects, emotions, individuals etc., is also an indispensible preliminary in the case of a fully qualified actor The basic Mudras are 64 in number and there were a number of subsidiary or auxiliary mudras, which are all variants of or evolutions from these basic mudras.

6. The Kerala Kalamandalam at Cheruthuruthy, Cochin State opposite Shoranur Railway Station, owes its existence to the genius

and foresight of Mahakavi Vallathol, the greatest of Malayalam Poets. It is an institution, where instruction is imparted in Kathakali in all its various branches. The services which the poet and Kalamandalam have done to the great art of Kathakali have been immense. The fame of Kathakali is to-day transcontinental. Numerous students from Malabar and outside have come and stayed at Kalamandalam, and have received training in Kathakali and its allied arts ; and the new technique which they have learnt have been of immense help in improving the standard of dancing everywhere. It can be said, with some pride that a large number of persons are earning their livilihood through the art they have acquired from this institution. There was also a Dance section attached to this institution till lately. It has not been transferred to and is functioning at the Radha Laksmi Vilasom Fine Arts School at Trippunithura near Ernakulam. Kalamandalam still continues to receive paying students from outside on reasonable terms in the Kathakali classes and its allied arts. The institution is now under the direct management of the Government of Cochin.

II The Tamil Stage

Of the Dravidian school of thought, Tamil language has got a drama of its own. Telegu and Kerala have practically no drama and it is poor in Malayalam.

Tamil drama follows the Sanskrit dramas mainly and has a mixture of prose and poetry and much of colloquial is also used. The drama there is called "Nadagam." During festivals or within temples some light pieces or translations from Bhavas are often acted, in which songs and dances predominate. As the low class people muster strong, obscenity is often taken recourse to, to make them laugh and enjoy.

Kalidas's Sakuntala translated into Tamil language by Ramchandra with introduction of obscene and farcical scenes used to be read as a drama. The drama "*Saranga*" from the pen of the poet Manikpulla was a popular composition and was staged in 1866 at Pondichery. The drama has resemblance to 'Puran Bhagat Nataka' in Hindi and the story is the same as is found in Purna Chandra of Girish.

"Tirubarand" is another drama. Some dramas, have been quoted by Prof. Sylvan Levi, but as we are concerned with the modern stage, we need not tire the patience of readers.

Although like *Kathakali* which is prevalent in Malabar, dances, ballads and songs are prevalent in Madras too, Modern stage, however has not a proportionate development. The European settlers who influenced the stages of Bengal and Bombay since the middle of the eighteenth century had a permanent stage in Madras only a century after. The Madras dramatic society formed in 1875, by the English, and Sangli Theatre of Maharastra which showed some performances in 1880 gave an impetus to Krishnacharya of Bellary who started the first amateur society of Southern India—The Sarasa Binodini Sabha, which staged Dasabataram.

Next came the touring Parsee (the Elphinstone, Alfred and Balliwala's) companies and staged translated pieces from Shakespeare's dramas Othello, Measure for Measure etc. Due to the inspiration from all these, "Museum Theatre" was built in 1898, and 'Kanaiya and Company' was started, from which time Drama and stage were showing some strides. For about 15 or 16 years there was some progress but the film then made its encroachment and practically drove theatre out of field.

Stage at Madras is not at all a developed one. It is hoped that cultured people will pay

attention to this defect and will try to found a regulated developed stage for the education of the masses. Uptil now female parts are being taken by males.

III TELEGU STAGE

Sanskrit Drama of ancient days did not contribute any way to the development of the Telegu Theatre which has developed only since the last years of the Nineteenth century, and it is the touring Parsee theatrical companies only which have considerably influenced the Telegu Stage. Before that Telegu had no stage-play, but shadow plays, dances country ballads formed the only amusements.

After the Parsi companies came to the important towns of Andhra, amateur companies have now and again been formed and unlike Tamil districts theatre became popular with middle-class people. But people of culture have a scare to be identified with professional stage. Even the best actors who have made acting their main source of living are afraid of being classed 'professional'. * This has a tendency

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* The Telagu Stage—Today ánd Tomorrow by K. V. G. Vide Andhra University College Magazine March, 1944.

to check the growth of professional theatres like other advanced provinces.

Cinema Industry has however told seriously upon the stage and although fifteen years ago there had been no city or town in the Andhra Desha which did not have a theatre of its own, today there is hardly a town where a play can be enacted in a theatre and for showing a performance a party has to rent a cinema house which with all disadvantages for theatre-shows and without its affording a choice of date charges Rs. 125 to Rs. 200/- for a single performance. Cinema has however changed the tastes of people which have gone a great way in improving scenes, dresses etc and introducing females on the stage. But female artists with suitable accomplishments for the purpose are seldom met with, although for a number of years actresses have been playing in female roles Men also appeared in their roles and amongst others Sitaram Narasinha Rao and Thola Venkateswara are still popular in feminine parts.

As the middle class men have envinced great interest and as "Andhra Nataka Kala Parishat" was founded about 15 years ago with the object of improving the Telegu Drama and Stage, we

hope, ere long we shall find a well-developed elevated stage throughout the Telegu districts.

Dramas also are being produced and Rukangada Nataka with six acts by Bhagwan Das from Bezwada in 1916, is a good drama.

IV Kerala Stage

Kerala stage of Mysore is now making progress through the patronage of the ruling people.

CHAPTER XI

SANSKRIT DRAMAS

In the last volume we have spoken of *Shapabashanam* and other dramas of Pandit Nrityagopal Kaviratna. We have also spoken of the performance of Sakuntala at Kotalipara. Regarding performance of Shapabashan at Calcutta which was so well done, we would refer our readers to "Bharati" of Agrahayan, 1297 B.S.:

"Style of the drama is so simple and chaste that there is no difficulty to follow the words. Abhimanyoo, on whose fight with seven charioteers is the theme based, acted his part wonder-

fully. Next comes Sakuni. Bheem and Durjodhan's display of heroism was overdone. Wailings of Judhistir, Subhbdra and others were too jarring to ears and sometimes excited laughter. But in the last scene Srikrishna's serenity and grave postures while he addressed the Pandabas was really very touching."

The students of the Sanskrit College under the direction of Pandit Haraprasad Sastri staged *Malabikagni Mitra* at the Belvedere house of the Lt. Governor about the year 1898. Surendra nath (afterwards Dr. S. N. Das Gupta, Principal Sanskrit College) played the part of Gonodas. They had a stage.

In 1901, students of Harihar College Kotalipara staged Beni Sanhar. Biraj Sarojini of Pandit Haridas Sidhwantabagees (afterwards Mohamohopadhya) was staged by students of Kabirajpur tol in 1905, Ashutosh Roy taking the part of Sarojini. At Bhowanipore Binapani Samity founded in 1900 by Pandit Gispati Kabyatirtha used to stage Uttar Ram Charita, Mrichhakatika and other pieces from time to time. Their performances at the Sahitya Parishad and other places were highly spoken of by contemporary papers. In Uttar Ram Charita the part of Ram was done to perfection by Pandit Gispati.

(vide Somprakas 8th June, 1907).

The Students' union, Bagbazar, staged Sakuntala in 1907, Sakuntala being performed by Bhuban Sankhyatirtha and Dusmanta by Upendra Mukherjee. "Uttar Ram Charita" was performed in the same year, the part of Laba was marvellously done by Bhudeb Bhattacharya, Ram by Janaki Bhattacharya and Sita by Bhubon Mohan Bhattacharya. In 1909 Harish Chandra by Ramendra Nath Gupta was staged. Students of Mulajore Sanskrit College also staged dramas 'Beni Sanhar' & 'Mudra Rakshas'.

By Sanskrit Sahitya Parishat.

Mrichcha Katika of Sudraka was staged, first on July 17, 1916 at Manomohon Theatre and subsequently in other theatres and also at the Kassimbazar Raj house under the direction of Pandit Gispati Kabyatirtha who had already achieved renown as director of Binapani Natya Samity. Pandit Kalipada Bhattacharya took the part of Charu Datta, Nagendra Byakarantirtha Basanta Sena, Janakinath Kabyatirtha Shakar, Khetronath Bhattacharya Bidushaka and Pandit Durga Mohan Sankhyatirtha as Aryaka.

Under the direction of Pandit Gishpati who was practically the guiding spirit, Bishakhadatt's *Mudra Rakshas* (with Janaki Kabyatirtha

as Chanakya and Durga Mohan Sankhyatirtha M. A. as Chandra Gupta) was staged in Oct. 1917, and also on subsequent occasions. Kshemeswar's *Chanda Kousik* in 1918 with Gishpati Kabyatirtha as Harish Chandra, Janoki Kabyatirtha as Biswamitra and Kasiswar Kabya Vedantatirtha as Saibya was appreciated.

Performance was done in dresses which would suit the occasion, time and the particular place. Dr. Suniti Chatterjee took a prominent part in the conception of dresses. It now hit the public theatres also to follow this practice.

Parishat also staged Kalidas's "*Sakuntala*" in Oct. 1918 at Monomohon, at Star, at the Government House at the invitation of H. E. Lord Lytton, and also during the reception of Calcutta's Mayor Mr. Subhas Chandra Bose at the Parishat House in October, 1930. Pandit Gishpati took the part of Dusmanta, Kalipada Bhattacharya—Kanwa, Nakuleswar Bhattacharya—Sakuntala, and Janaki Kabyatirtha—Bidushaka.

Sriharsa's '*Naganonda*' was staged in 1920 at Monomohan, *Beni Sanhar* in 1921 with Gispati Kabyatirtha as Bheem, *Madhyama Byaoga* in July 1919 with Rajendra Bhattacharya as Madhyama, Janaki Kabyatirtha as Ghatotkocha,

Dutabakya in 1921 with Janaki Kabyatirtha as Durjodhan, Chandra Bhattacharya as Sakuni, *Duta Ghototkacha* and *Urubhanga* with Gishpati Kabyatirtha as Dhritarastra in both.

Bala Charit was staged at the Calcutta University Institute in July 1924 and *Pratima Natak* at the Star Theatre in 1922. Pandit Janakinath Kabyatirtha appeared as Kangsha in the former and Ravan in the latter, Rajendra Bhattacharya Krishna in the former and Sita in the latter. The last five pieces as well as *Pancharatram*, *Urubhanga* are Bhāsa's dramas, and were staged several times.

During the 13th anniversary of Parishat held at the Calcutta University Institute in 1929 (Aswin 1336 B. S.) under the presidency of Sir S. Radhakrishnan, *Jarjara* festival commenced with the performance. It was introduced by Pandit Asokanath Sastri Vedantatirtha M.A., P.R.S. who has since then officiated as the priest on all occasions. He appeared as Sutradhar in all the performances and did well as Judhistira in Pancharatram, Sarngaraba in Sakuntala and also as Aryaka in Mrichchakatika.

Pandit Janaki Kabyatirtha was a talented actor, Chandra Mohan Bhattacharya a comic actor—Prof. Durga Bhattacharya versed in

Kabya, Sankhya and Puran of the Scottish Churchs College is also a good actor. He appeared as Bharata in Pratima and Chandra Gupta in Mudra Rakshasha

Mahamohopadya Kalipada Tarkacharya, Professor Nyaya, Sanskrit College is a dramatist and good actor. His Charu Dutta as Dusmanta and also as Kanawa (sometimes) were good.

The staging of Sanskrit dramas shows the culture of the Bengalis who do not seem to have lost the traditions of their forefathers, learning, scholarship and erudition.

CHAPTER XIII

RABINDRANATH ON THE STAGE.

We have described in vols I and II how Prince Dwaraknath Tagore was a great patron of the Chowringee Theatre, how in Jorasanko Theatre at the house of his son Devendra Nath Tagore (Maharshi) Navanatak and some of the pieces were staged by his grandsons etc. and how his house can proudly boast of a number of artists who occupy a place in world's history. We have

also in the last pages given an account how Jyotrindra Nath's and Rabindra Nath's dramas have been staged in various theatres of Calcutta. We shall in this chapter give an account of Rabindranath alone as on stage, both public and private, including performances by members of the house under his direction. The first appearance of Rabindranath on the stage was in 1880, Feb, in a small role in "*Manamayee*" of Jyotirindra Nath. But henceforward he used to appear in his own dramas only.

In February 26, 1881 (Falgoon 11, 1234 B.S.) "*Balmiki Prativa*" was staged at the Jorasanko House before a large number of respectable people amongst whom Bankim Chandra Chatterjee the greatest litterateur, Bengal, Indra Nath Banerjee, Akshoy Sarkar, Sitanath Tattwabhusan were prominent. It is the earliest drama of Rabindra Nath and he was in the role of Balmiki. Prativa a daughter of Hemendra Nath Tagore acted wounderfully, first as a girl and then as Saraswati. Her first * song as girl "Balika", from the stage runs as follows :

"What a dreary forest
How thickening clouds,
How dark the night,
A girl, alone, my heart trembles !"

* Arya Darshan, Baisakh 1288.

Akshoy Chowdhury took the role of first robber, Abanindra and Arunendra appeared as boys.

Prativa became afterwards Lady Chowdhury, wife of Sir Asutosh Chowdhury.

After the performance, the invited guests were entertained in a feast. †

"*Kala Mrigaya*" was staged at the same place on Dec. 23, 1882 when the poet appeared as blind recluse অন্ধমুনি (main role).

In 1888, *Mayar Khela* written by the poet at the special request of Mrs. P.K. Roy was staged by the Sakhi Samiti at the Bethune College. This was repeated many times and on 17-8-29 was staged at the Empire Theatre under the direction of Srimati Sarala Devi and Mrs. Rathindra Nath Tagore (Pratima Devi). Mrs. S. B. Dutt as Amar and Sm. Amiya Roy as Promoda acted theirs parts well. So did Sati Dasi as Santra and Nilima Gupta as Asoka. The dances also formed a salient feature of the play and Sm. Reba Roy's and Chitra's movements were very delightful.

This was also staged in English in 1923 under the direction of Babu Dinendra Nath Tagore and last it was played at the Chhaya Theatre

† Reminiscences of Sitanath Tatwabhusan.

on June 16, 17, 18 (1943) under the direction of Sm. Indira Devi Chowdhurany (Mrs. P. Chowdhury) by the students of "Geeta Bithan."

In 1889 "*Raja O Rani*" was staged at the house of Mr. Satyendra Nath Tagore at 49, Park Street, Rabindra Nath taking the part of Bikramadeva.

In 1880, '*Bisharjan*' was staged at Jorasanko and when staged at Park Street, in the presence of Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya, poet took the part of Raghupati.

Bisharjan was repeated in August 25, 1923, at the Old Empire, when the poet then 62, took the part of Joysinha. Rabindranath could not be recognised either in make-up or in voice. Raghupati was acted by Dinendranath, Govinda Manikya by Rathindranath, Rani Gunabati by Sangya Devi (Mrs. Surendra Nath Tagore), Aparna by her daughter Monjusree, Nakshatra Manikya by Tapan Chatterjee, Noyan Roy by Kshitish Chatterjee and Chandpal by Asoka Chatterjee. (see also page 256 below)

Mr. Abanindra was in charge of make-up and dressing.

In 1897, ***Baikunther Khata*** was staged at Jorasanko, the part of Kedar being taken by the author, Baikuntha by Gaganendra Tagore.

1908 Sept. *Sarodotshob* at Santi Niketan. Poet took the part of Sannyasi. This was the first time Rabindranath appeared at the Asram

1909—*Mukut* was staged at Santi Niketan.

1909—Oct. Prayaschittā " "

Poet took the part of Dhanonjoy Bairagi.

May 7, 1911. "Raja" staged with Rabindranath as Thakurda, and also as Raja from behind the dock-chamber. In April 1914, *Achalayatana* was staged during the reception of Mr. Andrews, poet appearing as Acharya Adinpunya. Mr. Pearson also took a part.

Easter 1915, Phalgooni was staged at Asram with poet taking the part of *Andha Baool* supported by Jagadananda Roy as Dada, Kshiti Mohon Sen as Chandrahash, Probhat Mukherjee—Sardar, Sarat Kumar Roy—Majhi, Kalidas Bose—Kotal, Santosh Mitra—Kalu. The stage-decoration was in the hands of the great artist Abanindranath. Before the play began the poet was also Kabisekhar in the prologue.

January, 1916—Phalgooni and Bairagya-Sadhan together, was staged as Asram. Poet first appeared as Kabisekhar and afterwards also came in his part of blind Baool.

July 1917—"Dakghar" was staged at the Asram. Stage decoration and dresses suited the occasion.

It was also repeated many times, even at "Vichitra"—at Jorasanko.

March 1918. *Guru* was staged at Asram.

Sept. 15, 1922. *Saradotshab at Alfred Theatre*, Rabindranath appeared as Sannyasi Dinen Babu Thakurda, Jagadananda Roy Laksmiswar. Next day too he appeared at "Madan."

August 25, 1923. *Bisharjan* at Old Empire as stated before in page 254, when Natyacharya Amrita Bose who was present spoke highly of the performance. The "Bengalee" of August 26, 1923, also writes about it :—

"The house was packed to its utmost capacity and the audience which included the pick of the society saw the play through with great interest. Rabindra Nath's appearance in the role of Joy Singh was the special feature of the attraction of the evening. The amount of pathos, human element and originality which the poet imparted into the acting was really a treat and could have hardly been surpassed in its excellence. Dinen Tagore as Raghupati (priest) gave an excellent account of himself and came in for a large share of applause. The part of Aparna which was beautifully rendered by Miss Manju Tagore is specially noticeable for the grace and natural charm of acting on her part. Mr. Tapan Chatrerjee as Jewraj and Mrs. Suren Tagore as Rani did full justice to their parts. Another feature of the play was the songs by Mrs. Sahana Bose who kept the house spellbound by her beautiful voice. Comic interlude was also not wanting. The play was a great success."

1926 on May 8, during the 65th anniversary of the poet Nateerpuja * was staged at the Santi Niketan, no part being taken by him, but when it was repeated in Jan. 28, 29, 31 at his Calcutta house in 1927 †, the poet himself took the part of Bhikshoo Upali, Sm. Gouri (daughter of Babu Nandalal Bose) as Srimati, Minoo of Rani Lokeswari, Chitra of Bashobi, Latika of Ratnabali and Amita of Rakshini.

Srimati's songs and dances were very beautifully artistically done.

On 1927, March—Nataraj was staged at Santi Niketan and on Jan. 8, 1929, Sundar at Jorasanko.

April 29, 1929, *Bhairoberbali* was staged at the Empire Theatre by the members of the Tagore family with the cast—

Bikramdev — Kshitishprosad Chatterjee, Sumitra — Monjusree Devi, Debdutt — Kunal Sen, Narayoni—Mrs. Sen, Ela—Aparna Tagore, Sankar—Kanakendra Tagore.

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* Taken from Rabindranath's poem "Pujarini" published in Aswin 1306.

† Repeated after poet's death on June 28, 1943 at Globe Theatre under production of Nandita Devi, who appears as Sreemati, Sujata Mukherjee as Lokeswari, Konika Mukherjee as princess Ratnabali, Suchitra Mukherjee Bashabi, Suparna Mukherjee Utpalbarna.

On Sept. 26, 28, 29—Tapati was staged at Jorasanko after poet's return from Canada, for four days with the cast :—

Bikramdev — Rabindranath, Debdatta — Dinendra Tagore, Rani Sumitra—Amita Devi (Mrs. Ajinendra and daughter of Babu Ajit Chakrabarty), Bipasha — Sumitra Devi, Kalindi —Nirupama Devi.

Rama Devi and Amita Sen sang

"Pralay Nachon, Nachle Jakhan,
Apan bhule, he Nataraj"

Besides the above representations Rabindra Nath, often appeared on the stage to enact recitation-performances, the following being worth mentioning.

Aug 16, 1922. Barshamangal at Madan Theatre

19, .. „ at Alfred „

Sepr 14, 1924 Arupratan at Alfred „

He recited the whole drama. Next was done silent and dance abhinay by girls. Sept 12 1933. Tasherdesh and Chandalika at Madan Theatre.

In 1935, on Dec, 11. he appeared when aged 72, as Thakurda in Raja in Calcutta residence.

In 1936 he left for Patna, Allahabad, Lahore and Delhi with a party to raise money for Viswsbharati by showing performances. The

last recitation performances were at Chhaya Theatre on March 19, 1938 and at Sree on Feb. 4, 1939 when amongst other pieces *Chandalika* was recited at both.

As we said, performances used always to be held at the yard of the Jorasanko house, a portion being set apart for the stage. Further, if one proceeds to the Jorasanko house, the red-coloured house to the left called the Vichitra Bhaban — where the Viswabharati office is now located, will also be found still to contain traces of a stage sufficient for 200 persons to witness. The house opposite to it to the south was the Nachghar where dances used to be practised by the members of the house.

N. B.—Besides newspapers and Magazines, I have been greatly helped in this Chapter by Babu Monindra Bhusan Gupta, Babu Probhat Kumar Mukerjee's biograpy of the poet, Probhat Chandra Gupta's article and Sita Devi's article in *Geetabithan* Barshiki (Ist year) edited by Mr. Gupta and also by Babus Pulin Sen, Benode Chandra Chowdhory and others at Viswabharati Office.

CHAPTER XIV

FAMOUS AMATEUR THEATRICALS

Amateur Theatricals are the nurseries of public theatres in Bengal. We have seen in Vol. II how private artists were men of great wealth and high culture. Even Girish Chandra the Father of the Stage was an actor of the Bagbazar Amateur Theatre. 'Indian Dramatic Club' produced Amarendranath Dutta. Shampukur Dramatic Club Aparesh Mukherjee, even Babus Tincowree Chakrabarty and Sisir Bhaduri, Naresh Mitra and Radhikananda Mukherjee were artists at first of some Amateur Clubs. Calcutta abounded with many and we shall name a few only here.

The Calcutta Sangit Samaj was a well-known club of which Babus Nibaran Dutt, Charuchandra Mitra, Amar. Bose (son of Babu Pashupati Bose) were good artists. At a later stage Babu Radhikananda Mukerjee also joined it. Nutu Babu and Aswini Babu used to tak e female parts. Babu Tincouree Chakravarty, Bhujanga Bhusan Roy and others were members

of the Bhowanipore Club, who staged Kapalkundala Biraha and other pieces. Tincouri Babu, Bhujanga Roy, Ahin Chowdhury, Indu Mukerji (a well-known actor) were also members of a Yatra party—Bhowanipore Bandhab Samaj.

Chorebagan Friends' Dramatic Club used to stage Pandab Gourab and other performances. Babu Bhupen Banerjee (dramatist) Bholanath Roy, advocate Paresh Sen and others were members and used to appear in different roles.

Babus Sisir Kumar Bhaduri, Lalit Lahiri Nirmalendu Lahiri, Rai Bahadhoor Probhat Kumar Mukerjee and a few others were members of the Old club which staged dramas of Mr. D. L. Roy including Bheesma.

Babu Sisir Bhaduri and Naresh Mitra were successful artists of the Calcutta University Institute which staged Chandra Gupta, Punarjanma and other pieces with success and brought the artists, epecially Bhaduri to lime light.

The Institute however staged performances even during the 19th Century and a brief history of its rise and progress will not be out of place.

Calcutta University Institute

The Calcutta University Institute (Society for the Higher Training of Youngmen, as it was

called), was first located at the hall on the east side of the Sanskrit College and performances by the junior members (composed of students of different colleges) used to be held. Michael's "Meghnadbadh" in an abridged form was performed in a miniature stage with success on Jun. 27, 1899 under the supervision of Pandit Haraprasad Sastri. Nagendra Choudhury of Hariraj fame used to train actors. Mr C. R. Wilson (afterwares Principal, Patna College), secretary to the Institute used to help the members in every way. Mr. Khetro Mohan Mukerjee, Prasanna Kumar Ghosal, Dwaraka Mukerjee Kiran Chandra Dutta and Sirish Chandra appearing respectively as Ravana, Laksman, Meghnad, Ram and Promila.

In the second performance of the same drama held on Feb. 16, 1899, Sir John Woodburn Lt. Governor of Bengal wast he chief guest He was so much pleased with the performance on March 4, 1900. that he gave an "At Home" to the members as a mark of appreciation.

Something very interesting occured in the second performance. When Mr. Kiran Ch. Dutt appearing as Ramchandra was offering prayers to the Devine Mother for the safety of Lakshan previous to handing over to Bibhisan for escart-

ing him to the arena of war, Sir John enquired, whether the prince of Ajodhdya was in prayers. On the reply being given by Pandit Sastri in the affirmative Lt. Governor stood up in a prayerful mood, and in the twinkling of an eye the whole body of guests numbering 400 stood up in the same mood.

All the papers commencing from Statesman, spoke highly in appreciation of the performance and we quote here only one for our readers :

The Indian Mirror—Sunday February 19th 1899. A correspondent (Mr. Amiya Nath Mukherjee—a 3rd year student of the Presidency College and a member of the Institute—at present a solicitor of the Calcutta High Court) writes :—

"The dramatic version of Michael's Meghnathbadh was repeated by the junior members of the Calcutta University Institute at the special desire, and in the presence of his Honour the Lt. Governor of Bengal on Thursday last. The Hall of the Institute was crowded, and among those present were Maharaja Sir Jatindra Mohan Tagore, Mr. Gayer, Private Secretary to His Honour Lt. Governor, Hon'ble Justice Gurudas Banerjee. Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar, Rai Lalmadhab Mukherjee Bahadur, Mahamohopadhya Haraprasad Sastri Mahamahopadhay Nilmoni Nayalankara, Pandit Hurrish Chandra Kaviratna, Messrs C. R. Wilson, J.N. Das Gupta, P. Mitter, Barrister-at-Law, B. M. Chatterjee Barrister-at-law, Babus P. C.

Mazumdra (Revd. Protap Chandra Mazumdar) Benoyendra Nath Sen, S. S. Banerjee Attorney-at-law J. N. Mukherje Attorney-at-law, Nagendra Nath Chowdhury and others. The performance was a great success. As usual, Babu Kiran Chandra Dutt of the Presidency College acted the part of Rama admirably well, and carried the audience along with him, The parts of Meghnad and Pramila were also well sustained. The minor parts were also well done, and the piece never flagged in interest from start to finish. The incidental music was tuneful and the scenery pretty.

His Honour was highly pleased with the performance and invited the members of Institue to entertain them at Belevedare on Saturday the 4th March, next."

Mr. Dutt was a well-known actor. Later his Arjuna in poet Nabin Sen's Kurukhestra staged under the auspices of Sahitya Parishad was also appreciated by the audience. His recitation also is very good. He is the President of Girish Parishad which staged "Balidan" very successfully during the Girish Centenary.

In the second year in 1900 Shakespeare's Macbeth was performed with Mr. Dutt as Macduff, and Jnanendra Bose as Macbeth.

Since then up to 1907, performances were generally done in English. In one performance probably in 1907 or 1906 when L. G. Sir

Andrew Fraser graced the occasion with his presence, an interesting incident occured. After the conspirators stabbed Julius Ceaser in Act III, Scene I, Cinna, one of them and a poet had the following words in his cue—

"Liberty ! Freedom ! Tyranny is dead !"

but the actor forgot the words Goaded by prompter and others he suddenly cried out those words. This however produced so great an effect on the audience especially Sir Andrew that he declared a gold medal for him expressing that the delay after seeing the blood of Ceaser was very natural with the poet.

About the year 1908, Pandit Sastri gave to the Institute the stage of the Sanskrit College where Malabikagnimitra and other pieces were performed (vide page 247) and after that Bengali plays used to be enacted and the Institute was the making of the coming Sisir Bhaduri. He did not however take any part in 1908 when 'Raja O Rani' was staged, as the part of Rebati was offered him.

In 1909, Kurukshetra as dramatised by Prof. Monmotha Bose who used to train the actors, was staged with Sisir Bhaduri as Abhimanyoo, Mr. Phani Bose as Karna and Mr. Naresh Mitra as Durbasha.

In 1910, Buddhadev (of Girish Ghosh) was staged, Sisir Babu appearing as Buddha, Mr. Phani Gopal Bose as Suddhodon and Mr. Srish Chakrabarty M.L.C. as Chhandak.

In 1911, Girish Chandra's Jana was performed with Sisir Babu as Prabir. Rai Bahadur, Raghobendra Banerjee (S. P. Howrah as Sri Krishna, Jnanapriya Mitra Vidusaka, Srish Babu Brishaketu and Mr. Kanti Mukherjee (afterwards official Receiver, High Court) Jana.

The progressive feature was that dresses and arms were used as much as possible suiting the period, and the occasion. Babu Suniti Chatterjee (afterwards Dr.) was in charge of this important feature.

In 1912, 'Chandra Gupta' which raised Sisir to lime light and was the stepping stone to his subsequent fame as Chanakya, was staged wifh Naresh Mitra as Katyaon, Indu Kanti Bose as Chandragupta, Srish Chakrabarty as Chandraketu, Biren Das Gupta as Alexender and Dwijen Roy as Chhaya. Conception of dresses was left as usual with Dr. Chatterjee. Members determined that performance of Chandra Gupta would not be seen on the stage before they would appear, but of all others Mr. Bhaduri

broke the vow.* The dramatist Mr. D. L. Roy was very much pleased with the performance. In 1913, the present author had an occasion to see the performance held in honour of the delegates of the Sahitya Sanmiloni.

In 'Ranjabati' staged in 1913, Sisir was a spectator but in 1914 he appeared as Parsuram in Kshirode Babu's Bhisma—He was then a professor of a college, and the gentleman who was selected for the part was not upto mark.

The Institute was also the making of the coming batch of leading actors of the Bengali Stage. Later, Babu Rabindra Mohon Roy also acted a part in Pandava Gouraba.

Discipline of the Institute was exemplary. Sir Gurudas Banerjee Ex-judge, a saintly character, was in charge of selection of pieces and Prof. Benoyendra Nath Sen the Secretary. Sir Gurudas did not even pass "Sadhabar Ekadashi." On one occasion he doubted if some artists were tipsy while playing Punarjanma, † and he was so much enraged that he threatened

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* 'Batayon' Sept. 20, 1935 p. 10 article by Mr. Srish Chakrabarty, M.L.C. Srish Babu wrote a number of articles on the subject in the same paper.

† Jadab—Naresh Mitra, His wife—Bhaduri, Srish Chatterjee architect had also a part.

suspension of performances. Rai Bahadoor Khagendra Nath Mitra was then the Secretary.

Besides the above, other important associations were the Kalighat Sangit Samaj, Calcutta Unique Club, The East Bengal Club, The Kalighat Club, The Lawyers' Dramatic Association, Alipore, The Shanagore Institute—noted for holding performances. Prafulla and Paraparey of Sangit Samaj (with Hari Mukherjee, Kisto Mukerjee), Unique Club's Balidan with Kanai Chatterjee & Nilmadhab Banerjee, were successful, but the most prominent in South Calcutta was the "East Bengal Club" (with Nawab Samsul Huda, Messrs. C R. Das, Karuna Dutt Gupta, N. C. Sen, S N. Halder, J. C. Das Gupta, Gunes Sen and others) where Girish Chandra's 'Grihalakshmi' was staged with marvellous skill by the actors. Kalighat Club's Profulla Balidan, Pathersheshe and Poshyaputra were also very successful. Similar were the performances of Pathershehe in Shanagore Club. In all these associations the present author used to be in the main role. But equally successfully did the lawyers of Alipore with Rai Bahadoor Nagendra Nath Banerjee, Public Prosecutor, as president and the present author dramatic director, stage Pathersheshe and Poshyaputra with masterly skill, & 'the Patrika' &

Nanchghar were eulogistic about the performances. In the last piece the cast was as follows :—

Shyama Kanta (present author) Rajani Pankoj Gangolee M.A.,B.L. Public Prosecutor, Alipore. Baikuntha—Dhiren Chakraborty B.L. Binode—Hiren Mitra M.A., B.L. (son of Mr. Hemendra Mitra), Hemendra--Naren Mukerjee B. L. Nanda—Surja Mukerjee B. L. Fatik—Sudhansu Das Gupta B. L. Bepin—Monoj Dutt, B. L. Jogesh—Fakir Chakraborty B. L. Sidhweswri—Gouri Sankar Mukerjee M.A., B.L. (now Sub Judge). Sibani—Haridhone Mukerjee M.A., B.L. Santi—Biswanath Chatterjee B.L. Harimati—Amar Mukerjee, M.A.B.L. Haraneer Ma—Amulla Bhaduri B.L. Secretary Mr. Biren Nag B.L., Jogen—Probhanshu Ghosal M.A.B.L.

As to the performance we quote below the observations of Amritabazar Patrika Dated Dec. 29-1932.

"It was a great treat to the distinguished audience who mustered strong on Thursday last to see the drama of "Poshyaputra" enacted by the lawyers of Alipur at the Calcutta University Institute. The hall was packed to its utmost capacity by more than 800 ladies and gentlemen. The parts were so admirably acquitted by the performers that the decided verdict of the whole assemblage was that the performance was an unqualified success.

"The leading 'role' of Shyamakanta was taken by Babu Hemendra Nath Das Gupta, the well-known litterateur and the author of 'Girish Prativa' and 'Deshabandhu Smriti' whose representation was so masterly that we cannot conceive of a better performance by any ordinary tragic actor. He fully represented all the conflicting feelings—anger, affection, remorse and grief and the acting was very natural. The scene where he fell fainting on the news of his son having been run over by a train and the climax scene where the son of Binode was recovered, drew continued applause from the house. He infused such pathos into his part that few could restrain themselves from shedding tears.

"Shyamakanta was very ably supported by Baikuntha, Rajani and Benode. They all contributed to the success of the play by their natural acting. Fatik by his oriental dance and Nando by his serio-comic expresion were very interesting and two pick-pockets did excellently well and songs of Pagal amused the audience very much.

"Of the female parts who deserve special mention—Sidheswari and Shibani and Santi did marvellously well. Their rendering of the parts was very artistic and the dance by Mr. Amar Mukherjee, another budding author was something novel. Amulya and Sukumar were excellently shown by two urchins, one aged 3 and an other 10 years."

The above Dramatic Club also staged Mahanisha, Datta, Grihadaha, Pandit Mahasay rendered into dramas by the members.

But the well-known Club 'Ananda Parishad' of Bowbazar deserves special mention. Mr. Lakshminarain Mitra was the guiding spirit. He rendered, before others attempted, Sarat Chandra's novels into dramas—Chandranath, Debdas, Charitraheen, Grihadaha & In Grihadaha which we saw acted at the Alfred theatre in 1926 with success, Mitter was in the role of Suresh, Keshabdeb Mrinal, Tarak Mukherjee Achala. All the artists did well.

The Youngsters also are not backward. The Bijoli Sangha staged 'Kedar Roy' successfully several times with Master Sunil Das Gupta (author's third son) in the main role, Chittatosh Chatterjee as Srimanta, Bireswar Mukherjee Karvalla, Balai Bhanja as Kaloo and Jatindra, author's second son (a good writer) as Mansingh. Sunil Das Gupta also appeared in this role at the Ashutosh College during the Silver Jubilee celebration. Young Das Gupta has a good voice and is now working in the dramatic section of the All India Radio. 'Sanibarer Baithok' also shows performances, with Protap Chandra as an artist.

The Evening Club, Calcutta an old club was also noted for showing performances. Babu Haridas Chatterjee was one of the artists there. Sisir Kumar Institute, Baghbazar, shows original pieces now and again

CHAPTER XV

THE REFORMED THEATRE.

The theatre is itself a reformed institution as the Germans most appropriately call it "A Lay Pulpit". Art can not be the monopoly of a particular section of the people only, to the exclusion of others whose devotion to it like that of the original performers of Chaitanya, and Jana, Rezia and Peara is exemplary.

Now to make theatre a so-called reformed one, a few gentlemen of Bhowanipore floated a limited company and called up shares in 1917. Their object was to introduce respectable ladies into the stage and eliminate public women from it altogether. Mr. Dhirendra Nath Mitter was the sponsor of the movement and he put his short skit *Matfaroka* on boards of Theatre Royal, on June 23, 1918, with Miss Patience Cooper, himself taking the part Jhareswar. The project fell through, and the Syndicate proved to be still-born.

Ten or twelve years after this, Kumar Gopikaraman Roy arranged performances of Singhal

Bijoy and Mogal Prativa in which Rani Suruchibala, Kumari Gouri and others took parts—Rani appearing as Kubeni and young Akbar. The attempt of the Kumar was very short-lived.

But a more lasting institution grew up under the direction of Mr. Madhu Bose in 1931-32 when a few ladies of some anglicised families with some artists started "Calcutta Art Players" (C.A.P.) which arranged some performances for a few years. The central figure in the party was Mrs. Sadhana Bose, grand daughter of the great Keshab Ch. Sen. She was assisted by other ladies—Indira Roy, Meera Halder, Nilima Sen and others.

They first staged Kshirode Prasad's Alibaba, the part of Marjina being played by Sadhona and Abdalla by Madhu Bose, both with artistic skill. They also staged Abu Hossain. Then on Feb. 16, 1933, Rabindranath's 'Dalia' was staged at the Empire Theatre in his presence and with his help. Priti Mozumdar was in the role of fisherman, Kalyan Mozumdar Rahamat Sheikh, Meera Haldar Julekha, Nilima Sen fisherman's daughter and last not the least Madhu Bose played the part of 'Dalia' and Sadhona of Ameena.

In 1933 another company staged Monmatha

Roy's 'Asoka' on Dec. 2, and "Konka-Lila" at the University Institute with Amala Nandi, Sefali Mozumdar &c.

"Mandire" of Souren Mukerjee was put on boards on 7-4-36 and then Mr. Manmatha Roy's services were secured as dramatist. Mr. Roy recast his Sabitri for C. A. P. and Sadhana did equally well in the serious part of the heroine. Miss Manjoo De (daughter of Mr. J. De I.C.S.) appeared as Saraswati.

In September, Mr. Ahin Choudhury's services were requisitioned for the company and Mr. Roy's "Vidyootparna" fitted with songs of Omar Khaiyam was put on boards at the First Empire on Dec. 8, 36 with Mr. Choudhury as Mohanta, Kali Ghose as Rājā, Madhu Bose as Indrajit, Bibhuti Gangulee as Bhadra Bhat, Monju De as Manjari and Sadhona Bose in the role of the name-heroine. Mrs. Bose acted and danced well and Mr. Choudhury too did justice to his part. Sales were very satisfactory.

'Rājnati' staged in Jan. 1937 was attended with success both on the stage and screen, * (Beng. Eng and Hindi), Mrs. Bose appearing in the role of Madhuchchhonda.

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* It was played on the screen as Râjnati in Bengalee, Raj Nartaki in Hindi and 'Court Dancer' in English. This was the first talkie made in India by Wadia Movie—Distributors, Columbia Pictures.

Towards the close of 1938, Mr. Roy's *Rupkatha* was staged with Ahin Babu as Jaksha, Sadhana as princess and Priti Mozumdar as prince, Sefali De as Muktā—

After this the party was disbanded for reasons best known to the organisors.

Two other associations may be worth-mentioning. Mr. Bhudhadeb Bose, a reputed writer in Bengalee arranged performances of "Maya Malancha" in Feb. and March 1944 from his Kālo Hauā—Mrs. Bose, Mr. Ramkrishna Roy Choudury, Mr. Probhat Mukherjee were the artists. The last gentleman's part was good—as Mr. O. C. Gangulee repored.

Some time ago "Gana Natya Sangha" has been formed which recently staged "Jabanbandi" by Bijan Bhattacharya on July 10, 44 at Sri Rangam for the relief of Chittagong sufferers. Their object seemed to be laudable—to impart education to masses through music, dance and dramatic performance, but we would like to hear more of them. Paran Mondal was represented by Mr. Gangapada Bose, his son Benda by the author, his wife by Tripti Bhaduri, Hashi by Bibha Devi etc.

"Natya Sree" has also been formed by Mr. Dwijen Sanyal and some ladies—Their last performance was Diganta on Aug. 28, 1944.

CHAPTER XVI

THE EAST BENGAL STAGE.

In 1861, Nildarpan was staged at Dacca in presence of its author Babu Dinabandhu Mitra under the auspices of East Bengal Dramatic Club consisting of a few middle-class men and soon after a permanent stage was built at a place, where the Jagannath College now stands, in the portion just to the north of the East Bengal Brahmo Mandir. It is here that Ramabhishek Natak was staged on March 30, 1872, before the National Theatre became public at Calcutta. The beginning was very happy no doubt, but Dacca did not prove an exception to the quality of its name. It has lagged behind in theatrical pursuits and at present there is no permanent house there. There is thus very little to rocord under this heading.

The National Theatre of Calcutta however in 1873, 1874, 1879 and the Star Theatre in 1888, showed some performances in the above Theatre Hall, in charge of a body consisting of Babus Abboy Charan Das, Mohini Mohon Das,

Motital Chakraberty, Mohesh Gangulee, Ram Chakravarty and others.

Besides the above, private parties also gave performances from time to time. Babu Paresh Nath Ghose, (the great wrestler and Teacher) and his friends formed a party. Their plays were generally borrowed from Calcutta Theaters.

Babu Harish Chandra Mitra made some original compositions which were staged by amateur parties (Pralhad, Janaki Natak &c)

In 1881, "Nawabpur Amateur Theatre Company" was formed with Pandit Ram Chakraverty, Pani Babu (Sir K. G. Gupta's brother Ganga Gobinda Gupta), Krishna Kisore Basak and others who took parts in *Sakuntala* as recast by the Pandit.

Next three sisters Monnoo bai, Annoo Bai and Noyabai showed some Hindi performances "Inder Sabha", "Jadunagore" at East Bengal Dramatic Hall—Tickets were sold. This was the first by women performers.

In 1888, Nawabpur Elysiam Theatre besides other performances took up an original composition "BilwaMongal" from the pen of Principal Kunjalal Nag (dramatic director) asisted by Pandit Ram Chakravarty. Although Girish's

Bilwamangal was a previous composition, this one too was popular for some time at Dacca. We saw a performance of it by the Sonarang Party at Munsihinganj in 1893.

Next came the Crown Theatre which was the first professional theatre built anew on the Purbabanga Natya Samaj Hall through the efforts of Babu Rakhal Basak. This was about 1892. In 1893, July, the present author saw performance of Purna Chandra of Girish Chandra, with Lalit Das as Purna Chandra and Dunia (actress) in the role of Sundarā. In 1896 Rakhal Babu secured Babus Mohendra Bose Bhabatarini, Mrs. Sukamari Dut, Sashibhusan Ghose, Atul Haldar, Kanok Sorojini and others from Calcutta, and had Calcutta pieces staged. Mr. Bose, Mrs. Dutt and few others returned shortly after, but Ghose and Kanak Sarojini remained permanantly.

The College authorities (with Mr. Mondy as principal) and Brahmo Samaj having raised objection to whole nights' performances in imitation of the Classic Theatre Calcutta, the Crown returned itself to a place in Islampur. It was here the present author saw Ardhendu Mustafi and Prianath Ghose in "Jana" performance in June 1899.

Besides Crown Theatre, Diamond Jubilee Theatre was started about 1897, the proprictor of which was Babu Kisori Lal Roy Chowdhury, who was also the proprietor of the Kisorilal Jublee School. In 1907, the present author saw some performances in June, where one Mr. Bagchi, Nagen Mukherjee and Sashi Ghose did very well in their roles acted with dignity as Seraj, Mohonlal and Karim.

Prof. Jogendra Gupta's *Anarkali* was staged in 1909 at the Crown. His *Chiriakana* had also have staged at the Lion Theatre. Prof. Gupta took an interest in theatre for some years In 1921 Babu Monoranjan Bhattacharya for the first time appeared as Chandra Sekher in public theatre. For some time Mr. Dhiren Mukherjee of Calcutta became the producer.

Crown Theatre was not heard of after some time. There is no theatre now at Dacca for the last quarter of a century. There were amateur performances only at intervals.

A New organisation under name "Dacca Theatres" has been started of late by Babu Brojo Gopal Das B. A. of Alakapuri Farashganj whose "Man and Machine" was staged on Aug 1, 1943, Mr. Das taking the main role Maha Danob, Mr. Ajit Gupta as Rup Kumar and Sita

Debi as Rupkumari. We hope—Mr. Das as also Mr. Taraknatha Das and large body of Dacca people of lead and light will take up the matter and start an ideal institution of theatrical entertainments for the instruction and amusement of the people.

AT VIKRAMPUR.

For over fifty years, from 1872—1922, Vikrampur villages were showing performances of a high order. The earliest and the most note-worthy was that at Bajrajogini when an original composition "Sitaharan" was staged (vide Dacca Prakas Sravan 21 and 28, 1279 B.S.) and the performanee was very touching. An artificial Panchabati was made with the help of trees and the concert was pleasing.

This was as the Dacca Prokas rightly remarked the first performance in the village of East Bengal. In 1887 the members of Bidganw staged *Asrumati* in which Pratapsing (by Kedar Das Gupta), Asrumati (by Durga Prasanna Das Gupta afterwards Govt. Pleader Cuttuck), Mansing (Umesh Ch. Das Gupta afterwards leading pleader, Munshigunge), Selim (by Jogendra Das Gupta Jute Merchant)

and Sakta Singha (Chintaharan Chakraberty afterwards Head Master, Rajshahi Govt. H. E. School) were specially successful. "Sorojini" was also staged at Patabhoge.

About 1890—1892, Bejganw people staged Sabitri Satyaban and Battle of Plassy.

Sonarang also had some good actors. Their Jana (with Abinash Sen as Jana), Naramedh and Profulla were well enacted.

Mulchar also had a dramatic club and Mr. Jogendra Gupta's acting was appealing. Bharakar also staged 'Balidan' with Mr. Monmatha Das Gupta, Advocate, in the leading role. And last not the least the Bidganw Club under the direction of Babu Tarak Das Gupta did admiraly. Their performances of Profulla Balidan, Bilwamangal and Joydeb were very attractive. In 1914 last, at the house of Deshbandhu C. R. Das at Telirbag during the Vaidya Sanmilani, Girish's "Balidan" was staged very successfully before an assembly consisting of hundreds. Prof. Rangin Halder M.A. was very successful as Dulalchand and so was Mr. Satyendra Das Gupta M.A. B.L. (Advocate Cuttack) as Saraswati. The present author was in the leading role of Karunamoy. Deshbandhu and his uncle Mr. Rakhal Das arranged the performance with the help of the present

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author, on the special occasion which was advocating stoppage of the dowry system.

Jobi by Makhan Sen was the most attractive feature of the Bidganw Club. His Srikrishna in Joydeb was also good.

Sarala and Purnachandra were acted well at Subhadya in 1896.

At Mymensing.

The Arati Natyasangha showed performances—Profulla, Raja Bahadoor &c. Mr. Monomohon Sen of Sonarang was the main actor. The Sangha existed more than twenty five years.

Prof. Jogendra Gupta's Anarkali was staged first at Arya Theatre in 1909, before it commenced at Grown. Before that it had been acted at Kalipur, a village of this district.

In May. 1909, "Raja O Rani" was staged for three days at the Town Hall in aid of Mahakali Pathshala then managed by the present author in which play, Raja was acted by Jogendra Gupta, Rani by Bhupendra Banerjee, Kumar Sen by Sitangsu Sen, Debdatt by Brojendra Gangulee the celebrated singer and the present author also had a small part. This was his first appearance, on the stage.

OTHER DISTRICTS

Casual performances are now and again performed in Bengal villages. But we can not close this chapter without mentioning the permanent Stage of the Labhpur village, in Birbhoom District built through the efforts of the dramatist Nirmal Shib Banerjee (author of Beer Raja, Chore, Ratkana, Nababi Amal and Rupkumari), which has often been visited by Calcutta artists, including Aparesh Babu. The well-known dramatist Tarasankar Banerjee also acted here some time. Nirmal Babu's dramas have not only been staged at his theatre but also in public theatres. Rupkumari was staged in 1924 at Art Theatre Lt. Calcutta.

Another permanent stage need he mentioned —one at Jaipur in Jessore. There is also one at Kaḷia under the management of Mr. Hemanta Sen. The present author appeared in this stage as Sashibhusan in 1928, Durgasankar in 1929 and Joydeb in 1931 (during the Puja time). Khulna town has also got a stage of its own where amateurs hold occasional performances.

The Jadabpur T. B. Hospital now and again arranges performances for the patients. This is very laudable and ought to set an example to other institutions of its kind.

CHAPTER XVII

NATYA MANDIR & MR. BHADURI

Mr. Sisir Bhaduri, as we have seen, was the leading actor of the University Institute which was keeping tastes of the people for theatre alive. His recitation was interesting and voice attractive. As professor of the Metropolitan College also he was popular with students for his reading of dramas and poems. So when he left the college and joined the professional Theatre there was great sensation amongst the educated people, especially the students.

The times also were eager for the reception of a man like him. Amarendra Nath who commanded great popularity amongst the student community was no more, the old actors were getting stereotyped and no new artist was coming to take their place, theatres, too, were not running well, 'Star' was dimming in light even with Tara Sundari, Minerva somewhat better was awaiting a tragic fate, Grand National was closed for good, Thespian Temple

died still-born, and only Monomohan was commanding packed-up houses; but even there Dani Babu was getting older and required rejuvination. At such a time the appearance of Sisir on the Bengali stage was considered as a blessing for it and when he appeared, public sympathy followed him in all admiration.

A stage also was not found wanting. The Madan Theatres Ltd. opened the Bengali Theatrical Co. at Cornwallis Street where the Uttara Cinema House stands, and secured Mr. Bhaduri's services on a high salary. A suitable drama with a character befitting Bhaduri was also obtained, and with that—Khirode Prasad's 'Alamgeer'—Sisir made his first appearance on the Bengali Stage on Dec. 10, 1921. His representation proved to be the most wonderful and he at once captured the imagination of the Bengali audience. From that eventful night, indeed Bhaduri's position as a brilliant actor was secured.

Equally successful was he as Raghubeer with Basanta as Samali in the drama of its name, that followed. He next staged some other old dramas and although he was here for a few months only, he left a great impression behind him. Indeed he promised to be the coming man of the Bengali stage.

He then left for the Taj Mahal Film Co. where his part of the hero of Andhare Alo created no less interest than before.

Then again, when Art Theatre Lt. was about to open with Karnarjoon, there was a proposal of his joining that, but it fell through. He however got good sales, when during Xmas Exhibition at the Eden Gardens in 1923, he arranged performances of D. L. Roy's "Sita" for four nights. The success gave him an incentive to start a theatre of his own. He then took lease of the Alfred Stage and hastened to open it with the same drama. But to his great disappointment, the right of Sita's performance was transferred to the Art Theatre by the dramatist's son. He thus opened the theatre with Moni Gangolee's "Basanta Lila" in March 1924, during the Dol festival, the charge of dances being left with the author of the piece. Krishna Ch. De took the part of Basanta Doot. With this, too, he got a full house. Alamgeer too, repeated here with Lalit Lahiri as Rajsing, Rabi Roy Bhimsing, Malini as Udepuri was being appreciated more and more.

The proprietor of the Monohan Theatre was about the time contemplating disbandment of his company. Bhaduri hastened to him at Darjiling and secured its lease. He now

made a resolve to open his theatre with nothing but 'Sita' and got therefore a new drama of its name written by Babu Jogesh Chandra Choudhury and staged it first on Aug 6, 1924. * People were impatient for his appearance, but his firm determination for "Sita" leaned them more to his side, and thus when he made the first bow at Monomohan, they received him most enthusiastically. Drama too proved successful not only for its good presentation by the performers but also more for the traditional Hindu ideal in its theme, which appealed to all classes of people equally. Success in the performance added feathers to Bhaduri's crest—and he stood now perfectly firm on his own legs. Bhisma was next renewed.

A word about the socalled new method of acting which was often heard of at the time. As seen in the performances of the University Institute, Bhaduri was an out and out product of the Girish School of acting—"which consisted in extreme naturalness in prose-acting especially in social dramas, but the poetry had to be read in proper metres. Above all, one had

* Ram—Sisir, Sita Prova, Balmiki—Monoranjan Bhattacherjee Sambook—Jogesh Choudhury author Basista—Lalit Lahiri, Durmukh—Amitava Bose, Laba—Jiban Ganguli, Kush—Rabi Roy.

to be absorbed in the character he had to represent". As to prose acting, there could not be any question, but as to poetry those who could not read as Girish or his worthy disciples directed, or as Ardhendu Sekhar exhibited, the metre now and then appeared not pleasing.

Now Sisir thought that to rise above Dani Babu, something different was required to be done, and the time too favoured him.

Those were the days when people were used more to the poises and movements of foreign actors as seen on films. Poetry too was not meeting that reception that was its previlege for over the past sixty years. Sisir now in his acting began to give twists in some places on the above lines and recite poems more like prose with his sonorous voice which itself was an attraction. Scenes and dresses also made some improvements. All these for a time dazzled the public mind and he received unusal backing from the people for his so-called new style which too, as we shall see, came to disfavour * in no time.

The next piece 'Pashani' staged on Dec. 13, 1925, proved not so lucky. He was in dual

* Vide Author's observations in chapter for 'Rang Mahal'—under Nandaranir Sansar.

roles of Goutama and Indra and though passed well as the former, his trick when playing the latter could not escape the notice of real artists.

Pashani gave sales no doubt, but the piece again raised vigorous protests from various writers and critics who disapproved of Ahalya (one of the five daughters whose name Hindus utter with break of day) being depicted as a whore on the stage. It seemed to them that the dramatist was carried away much by poetic imagination and deviated greatly from Balmiki. Manoranjan Babu's Chiranjiv was interesting.

Sisir next staged Jana of Girish Chandra on June 3, 1925 and for playing in the role of the heroine, secured the services of the celebrated actress Tara Sundari. It was at this time Art Theatre was showing the performances of Jana with Dani Babu (the dramatist's son) as Bidusak The latter objected to the drama being advertised for performance by Sisir Babu without his consent and a royalty being paid to him. Sisir Babu insisted on the performance irrespective of what might happen and people awaited the consequences with eagerness. All gossips were however set at rest by Dani Babu withdrawing all objections and the acting of Jana was marvellously done by the troupe specially by Tara Sundari and Mr. Rabindra Roy whose Krishna

was excellently rendered, (both his expressions and sweet, sonorous voice, rare with the then actors, appropriately fitting the part).

Mr. S. C. Bose's Pundareek was next put on boards on Aug. 18, 1925 and here too he did well in the main role with Tarasundari as Saki, Naresh Mitra as Bhringar, Charusheela—Rustan.

After having secured full public sympathy and name, Bhaduri now removed to 38, Cornwallis Theatre and opened "Natya Mandir" on June 26, 1926 with Rabindra Nath's Bisharyan, himself appearing as Raghupati, Rabindra Roy as Jaysingha, Manoranjan as Raja, Charusheela as Rani and Usha—Patal,as Aparna.

Mr. Bhaduri was here for over three years and was more established in reputation. In 'Naranarain' of Kshirode Babu (Dec. 1, 1926) he was in his usual self as Karna with Krishna Bhamini of 'Art' as Padma, and Charusheela as Droupadi, Rabindra Roy as Krishna but in Girish's 'Pandaber Agnatbash staged in Aug. he was marvellous as Bheem and Brahmin.

Further his Jivananda was rather superb in 'Sorashi' staged on Sept. 7, 1927 with Jogesh

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* When next he appeared as Joysinha, Naresh Mitra appeared as Raghupati for one night and Rabi Roy for the rest.

Choudury as Janardan Roy, Rabi Roy Prafulla Sailen Choudhury Nirmal, Amalendu Siromoni Manoranjan Sagore Sardar, Gopal Bhattacherjee Ekkari and Charushila as the heroine. * He used to be identified with the part and when later Rabindranath's Sheshraksha was added to it as an after-piece, it produced greater interest. Popularity of Sisir for about a year since the last piece was staged, was at its zenith, and he was now a power in the theatrical world. About this time people were very enthusiastic about him and his ardent admirers used to regard him as an 'abatar' and if any body uttered a word about any other person's talents being equal to or greater than his, he used to get good scolding if not a thrashing. Thus, however wrongly he conceived the character of Jogesh of "Profulla", they used to take his to be the right conception.

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* All papers were full of eulogy and "Forward" goes above all—"Bhaduri created a stir in the dramatic world of Bengal. In the role of Jivananda once again he revealed the talents of the master-artist. The audience remained spell-bound by the graceful and free movements. Constant modulation of voice was the special feature and the acting of Sisir was superb. As regards production, it must be said Bengali audience have not seen such a perfect production."

At such a time of his greatest fame, came an opportunity for people to see the contest between the old Dani Babu and himself while a performance of *Profulla* was advertised in his own theatre for raising funds for the statue of Girish Chandra to be set at the Girish Park, Calcutta. The cast for the performance held on the special night on Oct. 2, 1928 included prominent artists of different theatres who represented characters as follows—

Dani Babu—Jogesh, Sisir Babu—Ramesh, Sailen Choudhury—Suresh, Rabindra Roy—Sibnath, Tara Sundari—Uma Sundari, Kusum Kumari—Jnanada, Prabha — Profulla, Nirmalendu Babu — Bhajahari, Kartic De—Pitambar, Jogesh Choudhury — Madan Dada, Matalni—Ascharyamoyee&c.

The house was full to its highest capacity, audience expectant and occasion a solemn one, and although the characters of Jogesh & Ramesh are divergent and each one tried to do his best, the house was however decided in its openicn that palm was carried off by Dani Babu. Even the admirers of Sisir had to admit the superior genius of the old artist. This was the first rebuff Sisir got in his renown.

Next "Dig-Vijoy" relating to Nadirshah with Sishir as Nadir was staged on Dec, 14, 1928, the same day as Dani Babu appeared as

Durgasankar in Pathershеshe at the Manomohan Theatre. Shisir Babu acted no doubt remarkably well but Alamgeer appeared to be perceptible in the foreign plunderer, while with extreme pathos, changes of emotion and the tragic rendering, Dani Babu at once took its audience by storm. This was the second instance Shisir's position as the leading man of the Bengali stage got another shake.

Then rose up a bad star of Sisir's reverses. No doubt he was attractive as Rames in Rama in June 1929 and as Ketanlal in Sankhadhwani (Nov. 2-29) with Rabi Roy as Ajit Singh, but his disappointment knew no bounds when Tapati * of Rabindra was put all boards on Dec. 25, 1929. Tapati positively proved a failure and his popularity was on the wane. Sales fell off and in his inability to pay off his friends at the time of their need who advanced money at the beginning, he began to lose their sympathy. Over and above that, his uncontrollable habits of drinking too began to cause annoyance even to his own men.

At such a time he had no alternative but to discontinue his theatre, disband his party and

* Raja—Sisir, His brother—Jivon Gangulee, Debdatta Jogesh, Rani Sumitra—Probha, Kanka—as Bipasha, Rabi Roy—Kumar Sen and Ratneswar,

even join another Company accepting a position in the gift of its directors.

He joined the Art Theatre on a percentage of sales. There he appeared as Chanakya, Mriganka, Shajahan and other characters—But neither did he feel at home here, nor could the directors feel that his rendering was superior to that of others who appeared previously in those roles. At this time he got a great opportunity. He was invited to go to New York with his party to show performances there. This was a rare chance and let us see how it proved fruitful to him.

In America

In 1929, Mr. Satoo Sen interested in theatrical techniques, then staying at Now York got himself introduced to Elizabeth Merbury, an enderly lady possessed of vast influence who arranged performances of best companies of the old world including "Moscow Art Theatre." In the course of their conversation she wanted the first Indian Company to be brought to India and wished Satoo Sen to do the needful. Sen carried on correspondance with Bhaduri and the latter agreed to come.

After sometime, Mr. Erric Elliot, an English youngman saw Miss Merbury as agent of Mr. Bhaduri and entered into a contract with her for showing performances with the first class Indian Company. Elliot was given requisite money to bring back the troupe and the passage money was paid from New York. Carl Reed was the producer of Merbury.

Bhaduri's party consisted, besides himself, of Messrs Joges Choudhury, Manoranjan Bhattacharya, Biswanath Bhaduri, Tarakumar Bhaduri, Amalendu Lahiri, Sailen Chaudhury, Srish Chatterjee, Becha Chandra, Arbindo Bose, Pannalal Banerjee, Radhacharan Bhattacherji. Misses Kankabati, Probha, Parimal, Belarani, Sarala (Benki) and a few others.

The party reached New York in Oct 25 in two batches. Bhaduri was given a unique reception at the City Hall under the presidency of the Deputy Mayor a like of which had not been accorded even to Rabindranath who was then staying at New York. It was advertised from before that the best Indian Troupe was coming and that performance would be held at the Biltmore Theatre from Oct 28. All seats for the week were booked in advance, the minimum charge for a seat being 12 dollars.

The dress-rehearsal however proved very disappointing and Miss Merbury expressed her utter dissatisfaction of the performance. Reed was also of the same opinion but Merbury was furious. Next day, she withdrew all help and cancelled the premiere on the basis of the recitals in the deed of contract. The whole transaction cost the paying agents $ 20000.

Satu Sen now came to the rescue of the party. He not only managed with the news-agents for the prestige of his country, but was also arranging its shows by any means. After two months and a half elapsed, performance was arranged for a week in Vanderbolt Theatre from Jan. 12 to 17 in 1931. Some of the papers wrote no doubt in praise of the performances, but its sales were very unsatisfactory and even the ballet girls recruited from the locality could not be paid. Bhaduri's voice appealed to the audience but he was considered 'flamboyant' Probha impressed them more. One paper expressed Twice the queen shed tears, and we too shed tears with her."

That was all. The performance could not be repeated in America. Satoo arranged a contract with a company for performance in London, but this time luck was against Bhaduri.

The contract insisted on the part of Seeta being played by Prabha, but it became physically impossible for her to appear and the party had no alternative but to return in a Cargo steamer, fares being paid by Carl Reed's lawyer Mr. Fanel.

Before the party embarked on the steamer, the Labour Union as champion for the cause of the ballet girls &c, brought warrants against the party. On Satoo Sen's execution of an I. O. U., the party was let off.

No doubt Mr. Bhaduri and Prabha were appreciated, but the party as a whole was highly disappointing, as the selection was wrong. Durmukh was trembling during dress-rehearsal and persons who had never been on the stage before were entrusted with important parts. It was really culpable to put novices like Becha Chandra, Srish Chatterjee, Arabinda Bose on the American stage. A unique opportunity, rarely to be met with in the life of an Indian artist, was offered to Bhaduri but he could not take advantage it. It is useless to blame the American people for they know how to appreciate Indian merit. Uday Sankar got his due and there is no reason why Sisir would not get it, had he deserved it. He should have taken Rabi Roy, Jivan Gangulee and others who were with him. He should have also approached

the well-known artists—Messers Tincouri Chakrabarty, Ahindra Choudhury, Radhika-nanda, Nirmalendu, Naresh Mitra and others. He should have taken also some more accomplished artists—Krishnabhamini, Charushila, Nihar, Saraju, Light, Putul and some persons skilled in Oriental dance and music. He should not have also thought too much of himself and his equipments which he used to call as A one. He failed and with him the Indian Stage was also lowered in the estimation of the west.

Discomfited abroad, he now came home, but found no stage open for lease. "Natyapith" of Howrah allowed him to stage on April 30, 1931 but that came to no help. The Natya Niketan too gave him chances for four days and atlast the directorate of the newly built Rungmahal welcomed him with a bonus of Rs. 10000|- but Bishnoopriya of Jogesh Choudhury staged on Aug. 8, 1931 proved no success. During the Xmas he left with his party to the great loss of the company. His dealings as business-man also became anything but satisfactory. He next went to Natya Niketan and Mahaprasthan staged there on Nov. 25, 1932 was a failure.

He next comes to the Star towards the end of 1933, starts his "Nava Natya Mandir" and

stays there till May 1937. His activities at the Star from 1933—1937 have been described in pages 202—206. Biraj Bou, Bijoya, Ritimata Natak. demonstrated his skill no doubt, and Bijoya gave him very good sales, but he was getting unpopular. Grihadaha failed him. His voice too lost its usual charm and sweetness and often sounded hoarse. His acting also became unnatural with unnecessary display of limbs and voice. Journals once verbose in praise of him, began now to write in derision. Friends who idolised him came to scoff. By the end of the period he could not pay dues. He had already been insolvent. Creditors and benefactors lost faith in him and he began to fall out with the proprietors of the theatre. Civil and Criminal cases followed, and no doubt the criminal case started against him failed, but in the civil, a decree for ejectment was passed in favour of his adversary and he had to leave the theatre.

After that he had to live practically a retired life, as no stage was available. Now and then he tried to appear in combination with artists of other stages, but often did trouble ensue.

With all his lapses however, people had love and regards for him. They were prepared

to condone everything past. Thus when in 1942 he opened his "Sri Rangam" at the Natya Niketan stage with worthless pieces as Jivon Ranga, Urochithi and Deshbandhu, people still did not fail to extend their patronage and the present author paid him great eulogy when he was present to pay homage to the memory of Girish Chandra at the Girish Park in March 1942.

In "Michael", again, he displayed such rare histrionic skill as could be expected from none but him. Michael was at this time being acted in another stage too, by a distinguished actor with success, but Sishir even with voice failing and powers declining, emitted such brilliant flashes now and again that startled all. But that was the last. He has since left the stage and the public feels his absence very much.

Taking everything into consideration, it can not be denied that Mr. Sishir Bhaduri's contribution to the Bengali stage was great. But for him and the train of actors that followed him, Bengali stage would have been in a moribund condition. May God bring him on the stage back and give strength to revivify it.

CHAPTER XVIII

I NATYA NIKETAN.

"Natya Niketan" one of the best stages of modern time owes for its origin to the organising capacity of Mr. Probodh Chandra Guha who got the stage built through his exertion and performed the opening ceremony on March 14, 1931. On the 16th some select scenes were shown in which Dani Babu as Gadadhar, Jagat Seth, Ram of Raban Badha and Meghnad of Meghnad with others entertained the audience.

On the 23rd Match 1931, 'Dhrubatara' of Rai Jatindra Nath Sinha Bahadoor, as dramatised by Mr. Hemen Roy was put on boards in which the cast was as follows :—

Upen—Nirmalendu Lahiri. Arun—Mani Ghose. Old Brahmin—Monoronjan Bhattacherjee, Charulata—Neehar Bala, Banalata—Sefalika (Putul).

On the 30th May 1931, Mr. Manamatha Roy's Sabitri was put on board with Neehar as Sabitri, Kamekshya Chatterjee as Satyaban Nirmalendu Lahiri as Aswapati and Monoranjan Bhattacharjee as Dwoomat Sen.

Mr. Sishir Bhaduri who had just returned from America, showed performances for three nights in July persuading Dani Babu to help him. Dani Babu appeared as Chanakya, Jogesh and Vidushaka with Sishir Babu as Chandra Gupta, Ramesh and Probeer. "Balidan" too was to have been staged, but could not be done. Mr. Guha, however with Mr. Khetra Mitter's help arranged it with Dani Babu as Karoonamoy, Nirmalendu Babu as Dulal, Neerada as Saraswati, Ascharja as Jobi, Handu Babu as Ramanath and Kshetro Babu as Mohit &c., on July 21, 1931.

On the 14th Nov. 1931, Sachin Sen's *Jharer Rate* was staged when excellent light-arrangements under Satu Sen's direction were shown. The drama is new of its kind. Prosanta, Bijali, Probhanjan, Mejdi, Sandya, Reba and Rai Bahadoor were respectively represented by Lahiri, Neehar, Radhikananda, Susila Sundari, Putul, Nirupama and Lalit Mitra.

Nazrul's Aleya and Nirupama Devi's *Didi* as dramatised by Sivaram Chakravarty next followed in Dec. 1931.

"Satitirtha" * a tragedy by Sachin Sen was staged on June 20, 1932.

* Durgadas as Beerbhadra, Nihar—Sabeetri, Kusum Kumari—Sadoo Pishi, Bhumen Roy—Sobhanlal and Ranibala as Ambalika.

Next was staged Jaladhar's "Andhare Alo" on July 8, 1932 which was followed a month after by Sudhin Raha's "Biplab".

Mr. Bhaduri who had left Rungmahal made now this place as his stay, and from Nov. 25, 1932, began to stage "Mahaprasthan" a new drama of Satyendra Krishna Gupta with the following cast :—

Sri Krishna—Mr. Bhaduri, Gandhari—Konka, Lakshana—Neehar, Jarasandha—Bhumen Roy, Mayabati—Sefalika, Basudeb—Jogesh Chaudhury, Arjoon—Sailen Chaudhury.

Neither the drama nor its performance impressed anybody and Bhaduri then left for the Star Theatre.

Left alone, Niketan now showed Sachin Sen's Janani in July with Charushila in the main role which was followed next by "MA" on Dec. 16, 1933 dramatised, before, by Aparesh Babu from Sm. Anurupa Devi's novel. This with Neehar as Brojarani and Ahindra Babu as Arbinda proved successful. *

Of the three pieces of 1934, Purnima Milan (Jogesh), Swarnalanka (S. Kar) and Chakra-

* Charushila—Sarat Shashi, Saraju—Boy Ajit, Nirmalendu Lahiri—Netai, Monoranjan—Mrityaunjoy Bose, Kusum Kumari—Durga Sundari and Neroda—Arabinda's widowed mother.

byuha (Manoranjan Bhattacherjee's first attempt as adapted from Bhasa's Pancharatram) the last proved a little better, with Ahindra Choudhury as Sakuni, Nihar Abhimanyoo, Charushila Droupadi, Bheem—Nirmalendu Lahiri, Karna dramatist, Sarajoo—Uttara.

In 1935, "Janmatithi" staged on March 30, was followed by Prabhabati Devi's Brata Charini dramatised by Manoranjan Bhattacharjee on April 19, 1935, with the cast—

Behari—Ahin, Jyoti—Nirmal, Rajani—Monoranjan, Jayanti—Charushila, Eva—Sarajoo, Sita—Nihar.

Natya Niketan was next converted into a company limited to shares under the name Calcutta Theatres Limited with Mr. Jashodanarain Ghosh as Managing Director.

In July 11, 1935 Khona (Manmatha Roy) was staged with Ahin as Baraha, Jivan Ganguli as Mihir, Saraju as Khona, Charushila as Dharani.

Sachin Sen's "*Nara Devata*" staged on Dec. 14, 1935 referring to temporal power and indifference of the king to the miserable condition of subjects was soon proscribed. The part of Raja was taken by Ahin, Agnibesh by Bhumen Roy, Debdatta by Rabi Roy. This was the

worst time for the proprietor Probodh Babu and he passed through difficulties which however did not seem to thwart him.

Vidya Sundar was staged on the 21st December 1935 with Jahar Ganguli as Sundar, Nehar as Hira, Charubala as Vidya and Rabi Roy as Ajameel.

Difficulties still thickened, but "Kedar Roy" (Ramesh Chandra Goswami) staged in April 4, 1936 improved the position to a certain extent. The performance was successful throughout, and the cast was as follows :—

Kedar Rai—Ahin Choudhury, Karvello—Bhumen Roy, Kalu Sardar—Mani Ghosh, Chand Roy—Rabi Roy, Ishakhan—Jahar Ganguli, Maya—Renuka Roy, Srimanta—Naresh Mitra, Santi—Chhayadevi, Ratna—Charubala, Sona—Nirupama, the roles of Kedar Roy, Chand Roy, Karvello and Srimanta being marvellous.

Rabindra Nath's Gora was staged in Dec. 19, 1936 with the following cast :—

Anandamayi—Raj Laksmi, Barada Sundari—Monorama, Sucharita—Santi Gupta, Paresh—Ahindra, Panu Babu—Naresh Mitra, Gora—Bhumen Roy Mahim—Rabi Roy, Binoy—Jahar, Lalita—Charubala.

Anandamayi, Paresh, Panu. Mahim and Lalita were appreciated by the audience.

In 1937 sales began to fall, so the prices of tickets were reduced.

Manmatha Roy's Satee was staged on April 28, Mogul Masnad on June 30, and Babrubahan on Dec. 14, 1937.

The position of the theatre was bad and misunderstanding continued between Probodh Babu and Jashoda Ghosh and the latter removed to Rangamahal at Upper Chitpore Road with all appurtenances. In this time of difficulty Messrs. Rabi Roy and Jiten Ganguli came to his help and organised a troupe to stage Sachin Sen Gupta's Serajaddoulla on June 29, 1938 with Mr. Nirmal Lahiri as Seraj, Rabi Roy as Golam Rahaman, Neehar as Aleya and Saraju as Lutfunnessa. Without entering into merits of the drama, we must declare that the play was really a success, especially with the above parts. As soon as however the glamour was gone, Probodh Babu again reduced the prices of admission and Lahiri and Roy left.

Manmatha Roy's "Mirkasim" was now staged on Dec. 17, 1938 with Mr. Chhabi Biswas in the main role. Situation did not improve until Srijut Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's well-known novel *Pather Dabi*—just released from proscription was rendered into drama and put on boards on May 13, 1939 with Mr. Ahin

Choudhury as Sabyasachi with Putul as Bharati and Probha as Sumitra.

This ran for some time only. Mahamayar Char staged on Dec. 1, 1939 by Jogesh Choudhury with himself as Mrityunjay and Lahiri as Sachin though passed tolerably, Satyendra Gupta's Agnisikha (Dec. 30, 1939) was worse. Niketan was gasping and neither did Parinita of Mr. Choudhury with himself Jamidar and Neehar as his wife nor Bharatbarsha of Sachin Sen Gupta with Naresh Mitra as Bharat and Rabi Roy as Paresh, improved matters. Then was staged Tarasankar Banerji's *Kalindi*, probably his first attempt, on July 12, 1941 with Naresh Mitra as Achintya, Sailen Choudhury as Rameswar, Rabi Roy as Indra Roy, Bhumen Roy as Ahindra and Neehar Sunity and last of all, "Mahasakti" with Rabi Roy in the main role of Sambhu gave the finishing stroke. When next a piece with hope against hope was put under rehearsal, up came Mr. Bhaduri to take possession of "Niketan" to the exclusion of Prabodh Babu.

II Sri Rangam.

About the Puja time 1941, Mr. Sishir Bhaduri took lease of the Natya Niketan Board and

opened a new theatre "Sri Rangam". After having staged the old dramas he opened a new piece "Jivan Ranga" on Jan. 10, 1942 with himself in the main role. He introduced a new set of actors and none of his old associates except Mr. Sailen Choudhury was with him. The piece took two hours to act and created no impression. This was followed by Urochithi on March 7, and "Deshbandhu" on Oct. 10, 1942. In the former Sishir Babu appeared as Sunil and in the latter as Deshbandhu.

"Maya" followed the above on Jan. 16, 1943. None of the above pieces created any interest.

"Michael" was staged in April 1943 and although sales were not good, Mr. Bhaduri's representation of the hero of blank verse appealed to the cultured audience. English pronunciation of Henrietta was also charming.

Bhaduri could not make much headway but luck favoured his party this time. Bipradas dramatised by Bidhayok Bhattacherya from the well-known novel of Sarat Chatterjee was put on boards with the cast—

Bipradas—Biswanath Bhaduri, Dwijadas—Mihir Bhattacherjee, Sasadhar—Ranjit Roy, Rai Saheb—Sailen Choudhury, Bandana—Malina, Kripamoyee—Nibhanani.

Mr. Biswanath's part was natural. So was Mr. Choudhury's. Bipradas 'was followed by Bidhayak's "Taita" a hilarious piece with the film actress Malina in the main role.

Theatre still bears the name of Mr. Sisir Bhaduri as proprietor, but the real Hamlet is not there. We hope to see him on the stage with health recouped and fresh energy regained.

"Bandanar Biye" is the last piece staged here.

III RUNG MAHAL

The credit of starting this theatre lies with Babu Rabindra Mohan Roy, the well-known artist. After he left the service of Minerva after having acted the part of Amar in "Rangarakhi" in May 1930, he with the help of the blind singer Krishna Chandra De floated a limited company by raising shares and arranged the construction of the Theatre on the piece of land at 65/1 Cornwallis Street which they took lease. of In the meantime they showed performances in neighbouring places in the name of Dipti Sangha. Mr. Naresh Mitra, Miss Light and Nivanoni were with them.

By this write. Mr. Bhaduri returned from American but wanted a stage badly. Majority

of the directorate consisting of the above two, and Messrs. S. K. Gangulee, N.C. Chunder, D.N. Dhar Hem Chandra De and S. Ahmed) however brought him and his party on payment of Rs. 10000/- to him an bonus and Mr. Jogesh Chandra Chowdhury's *Vishnupriya* was put on boards on the opening night of the Theatre (August 8, 1931) with Mr. Bhaduri as Gouranga, Probha as the heroine, Nripesh Roy as Nitai and Jogesh Babu himself as Adwait. Satoo Sen who had returned from America became the stage manager. Rabi Roy, De, Light and Saraju were left out of the cast, yet they managed to appear in minor roles.

Next, after running some old pieces including Asoke (with Bhaduri as Asoke and Rabi Roy as Mar), Sisir Babu left with his party, putting the company to much loss.

Roy and De again took the lead and began to manage with difficulty, sometime even borrowing artists from Probodh Babu of N. N. They then put Sourin Mukerjee's *Rumela* on Jan. 17, 1932 with Sefalika in the name role supported by Roy as Jafar, De as Mollu and Light as Monia.

Debdasi staged during Sivaratri with Roy as Sekhar, Prokashmoni as Parboti and Sefalika

as Rajani Gandha was followed by *Ranger Khela* in Dol with Rabi Roy as *Krishna* Charubala as Malaya; Krishna De Basanta, Light Srimati and Putul Brinda.

Sindhu Gorab by Utpal Sen was next staged on June 25, 1932 with Roy as Ranjan, Nirmal Lahiri as Rangalal and Sarajubala as Aruna. Satu Sen was in charge of stage management.

In July Jaladhar Chatterjee's *Asabarna* was staged with Nirmol Lahiri as Dhanuki, Sarajoo as Malaya and De as Bani Kantha.

This was folled by "*Raijya Sree*" in October 1932, with Rabi Roy as Protap, (hero), Saraju heroine Kartic De as Pundarik, Sontosh Sinha Raja and Santabala as Rani.

The theatre did not run well and before X'mas performances had to be suspended.

Management of the theatre, during the crisis, was next transferred to the hands of Messrs Shisir Mullick son of Mr. S. C. Mullick I.C.S. Mr. Mullick began to manage the Theatre with Messrs Jamini Mitra and Satu Sen. After finishing 'Banerpakhi' rehearsal of which had commenced before, the management staged "*Mahanisha*" on April 17, 1933, dramatised by Mr. Jogesh Choudhury from Anurupa Devi's

Novel of the name and the play successful as it was, fetched much money to the management. The cast was as follows :—

Muralidhar—Rabi Roy, Radhika Prasanna—Jogesh Choudhury, Behari—Naresh Mitra, Brojoraj—Bhumen Roy, Nirmal—Rateen Banerjee, Kesab Doctor—Amar Bose, Soudamini—Ashmantara, Aparna – Sefalika. Dheera (the blind girl)—Charubala, Kedar Babu—Hiralal Chatterjee.

All the above parts were magnificent and Dheera very natural. From now on, a revolving stage was set in Rang Mohal. It spoke of great improvement of the stage. The credit lay with Satu Sen who inaugerated it with the help of Mr. Shisir Mullick.

This was followed by Mr. Monmotha Roy's *Asoke* on December 2, 1933, when amongst others the part of Tishwarakshita was played by Santi Gupta who appeared for the first time on the stage and did the part well. Rabi Roy Indu Mukerjee, Ratin Banerjee, Suhashini, Bhumen Roy, Naresh Mitter, Amar Bose, Jogesh Choudhury and Bijoy Kartic appearing as Asoke, Mahendra, Kunal, Devi, Bitasook, Khallatak, Dimakas, Upa Gupta, Radha Gupta respectively. Roy brothers did well.

Next Patibrota by Mr. Jogesh Choudhury dramatist (from Kumar Dhirendra Narain Roy's

novel "Shparesher Prabhab") which was staged on 31st March 1934 with the following cast :—

Rajyeswar—Jogesh Choudhury, Kalinath—Naresh Mitra, Ranendra—Rathin, Jyotsna—Santi Gupta, Tarala—Sefalika, Matangini—Blackie, Bimal—Bhumen Roy, Gopi Gunda—Krishnadhan Mukerjee, Sonamali—Amar Bose.

This was followed by-"*Kajri*" a charming opera by Sailen Roy and Souren Mukerjee which created some sensation from the 7th August 1934. The cast was as follows :—

Anadi—Naresh Mitra, Pallab & Tomal—Rabi Roy, Siharan—Bhumen Roy, Mr. Goss—Amar Bose, Barada & Syamol—Jahar Gangulee, Ashu—Krishnadhone, Lililal—Jogesh Choudhury, Koela Singi—Suhasini, Satya Bhama's Pishemohasay—Hiralal Chatterjee.

Then was staged "*Banglar Meye*" staged by Jogesh Choudhury from Prabhabati Devi Sareswati's story "Pather Seshe" on September 20, 1934 with the following cast :—

Upen—Jogesh Choudhury, Jiten—Naresh Mitra, Satyen—Rateen Banerjee, Suresh—Rabi Roy, Prokash—Jahar Ganguly, Anil—Bhumen Roy, Devi—Charubala, Bhabani—Renu Bala (Sukh), Bithi—Sefalika, Maya Banerjee—Santi Gupta.

Jogesh Babu, Naresh Babu and Roys rendered their parts well and as to Santi Gupta she too was interesting, and if we could ignore one or

two gestures which were laboured, we would certainly call it superb.

This was followed by Mr. Choudhury's Ravan (December 12, 1934) which did not run well but the next piece Pather Sathi by Jogesh Choudhury from Anurupa Devi's story of the name was staged on May 9, 1935 with author as Basanta Sen, Rabi Roy—Saradindu (eldest son) Jahar as Sasanka, hero (younger), Naresh Mitra as school master, Amareshwar, Rathin as I.C.S. Hironmoy, Bhumen Roy as Narendra Narain, Rajlakshmi as Bindubasini, Santi Gupta—Rubi. Naresh Babu was very natural.

At this stage, Amar Ghose came again and owing to some difference between him and Mr. Mullick, the latter left. Roy brothers, Jahar Gangulee and Charubala also left the concern.

During Ghose's time which was again temporary this time, Charitraheen (from Sj. Sarat Chatterjee's novel) was staged on December 20, 1935 with Jogesh Choudhury as Shivaprosad, Monoranjan as Upen, Naresh Mitra as Haran, Ratin as Satish, Dhiraj Bhattacherjee as Divakar, Santi Gupta as Kiron, Sefalika as Sabitri, Suhasini as Surabala.

Sudhir Raha's "Sarbahara" was staged on 30th May 1936 and Nandaraneer Sansar (Jogesh

Choudhury) was staged on August 20, 1936, after which the theatre was suspended for sometime.

Probha had come here only recently and she played the part of the elder sister of Nandarani represented by Ashantara. Jogesh Babu was their maternal uncle. Mahim, Nandorani's husband was represented by Monoronjan Babu and son by Dhiraj Bhattacharjee.

Nandaraneer Sansar no doubt failed but we noticed a marked difference in the acting of some prominent artists, especially in Jogesh Babu, Monoranjan Babu and Miss Prabha, all of whom got some training from Sisir Babu. Jogesh Babu was now entirely free from the modern influence and became an out and out artist of the Girish * school. He used to act with feelings and discard borrowed gestures from outside. His Radhika Babu, Upen, Sivaprosad, Basanta Sen were really good and he was at his best in the last piece here. To add to this natural acting, if he had the gravity and depth of voice like even that of Aparesh Babu, he would have been the best artist for social

* Jogesh Babu's criticism of Girish's social dramas won him a gold medal before he joined Public Stage. Also see page 287.

dramas during the last period which remained void after Dani Babu's death. Be that as it may, we noticed also that Probha would take a long time to come to that standard and as we shall see, she actually came to that at a subsequent stage. Monoranjan Babu was slowly proceeding, although his Rajaninath was unexceptionable under Aparesh Babu's training. Jogesh Babu topped the list of all artists as triumphant in the conflict of old and new and as we shall see he was superb in "Dui Purush" or conflict of two generations, the drama with which his drama of life also came to a close.

In 1937 Messrs. Krishna De, Jamini Mitra and Raghunath Mullick (Godai Mullick's son-in-law) took over charge and commenced with "Abhishek" on May 15, 1937 with Durgadas as Bharat. After Sachin Sen Gupta's 'Pralay' with (Durgadas as Kubja), 'Detective', and "Bandini" were staged, Sachin Sen Gupta's "Swami Stree" was staged on Dec. 24, 1937. Durgadas Babu as Lalit was popular, supported by Ranibala as Lily, Jahar Ganguli as Mohan, Usha Devi as Minoti, Sontosh Sinha and Padmabati as Mr. and Mrs. Das. Mr. Das was really natural.

After four nights of Swami Stree, theatre was closed. But Mr. Godai Mullick came to help and it continued.

After "Meghmukti" was staged on July. 13, 1938, with Jogesh Babu as Prof. Ghose, Sachin Sen Gupta's Tatinir Bichar was put on boards on Dec. 24, 1938 with Mr. Ahin Choudhury as Dr. Bhose, supported by Ranibala as Tatini, Ratin Banerjee as Basanta, Jahar as Samar, Padmabati Lalita, Rajlakshmi as Krishnabhamini. All these parts were acted well but the chief attraction was Ahindra Babu who was really wonderful in this role.

The above three lessees left and Amar Ghose again took up the management when the following pieces were staged under the direction of Prabhat Sinha :—

On 1939 May 20 Makarshar Jal (Jogesh Choudhury) was staged with—

Durgadas—as Smarajeet, Monoronjan—as Suren, Santi Gupta—Suniti, Prabhat Singh—Bhudor Mukherjee.

On 1939 July 5, Dr. Miss Kumud (Ayesh Kanti Bakshi)—

Samiron—Bhumen Roy, Dr. Miss Kumud—Santi.

Bidhyak's two more pieces were now put on boards—one was *Mateerghar* staged on September 9, 1939 with :—

Durgadas—Alaka, Monoranjen—Satyaprasanna, Santi Gupta—Chhanda, etc.

The next was "Beesh Bachhar Age"—(a crimo-social piece) staged on Dec.27,1939 with—

Prabhat Sinha—Deepak (actor), Bhumen Roy—Pradip, Santi Gupta—Tamasha, Monoranjan—Dukhadahan.

Mr. Durgadas was to have taken the part of Deepak, but he left the concern in disgust.

Amar Ghose then brought Messrs. Ahin Choudhury and Rabi Roy in Ashutosh Bhattacharjee's 'Agami Kal' staged on May 15, 1940. The following persons appeared :—

Umaprasanna—Ahin, Madhab—Rabi Roy, Bimal—Bhumen Roy, Srinath—Krishna Chandra De.

Bidhayak "Mala Rai" was staged on 14th August 1940 with Naresh Mitra as Mr. Sen and Santi Gupta as Mala Rai, Ushabati as Mrs. Sen, Rabi Roy as Abinash.

On December 14, 1940 — "Ghurnee" (Gourshee's crimo-social piece, was staged with :—

Ahin—as Prabhakar, Bhumen — as Sagore, Rabi Roy—as Runoo Sardar, Santi Gupta—Bharati.

After "Ratna Deep" dramatised by Bidhayak from Prabhat Mukherjee's novel was staged on Dec. 24, 1940 with Ahindra as Khagendra — Sonar hareen, Santi Gupta—Kanak, Bhumen Roy—hero,—Rungmahal was again closed.

Jamini Mitra again took up the management with the help of Durgadas and opened Kapal Kundala on June 21, 1941 with Durgadas as Navakumar. He also appeared as Sateesh in Charitraheen with Rabi Roy as Upon.

After three new pieces were staged—

(1) Rakterdak with Durgadas as Suhash on July 12, 1941.

(2) Tulsi Lahiri's 'Mayerdavi' with Durgadas as Bikash, Santi Gupta as Karuna, Tulsi Lahiri as Bolaki and Satya Mukherjee as bearer on October 1941, and (3) "Tumi O Ami" on 3rd Dec. 1941,—Mr. Mitra took leave of Rungmahal.

In 1942, Mr. Sarat Chatterjee (who was an actor of Upen Babu's theatre for a pretty long time) took lease of the theatre with the help of a relation of his. After the latter fell into some difficulties, Chatterjee himself began to control. Jivanpathe was staged in February and Dhiren Mukherjee's Sroterphool on March 19, 1942, Messers Ahin Choudhury, Sontosh Sinha, Ratin Banerjee, Bijoy Kartik Das, Sm. Ranibala and Suhasini joined Rungmahal. Ahin Babu was in charge of direction and put Mr. Mohendra Gupta's "Michæl" on Jun 5, 1942. The play

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*** On the 100th performance, the author of this book had the honour to preside at the function and distribute prizes to artists.**

with Ahin Babu in the leading role along with Ranibala as Henrietta was a success, and although Bhaduri's Michæl was culturally superior, Rungmohal got better sales and Ahin Babu as usual performed his part with heart.

The next piece Ayes Kanta's "Bholamaster" staged on Dec. 17, 1942 commanded still better sales and insured Ahindra Babu's popularity all the more. The play is of two acts, the first one being devoid of interest and in the second Choudhury with appropriate make-up, characteristic of him, carried the audience night after night but in Bholamaster, Shajahan and Chandra Babu now and again seemed to peep through. Rezia was next revived with Ranibala as Rezia. 'Sunny Villa' was the X'mas Pantomime.

In Feb. 1944, Ratin Babu and Ranibala left for Minerva and Amal Banerjee and Santi Gupta came here. But the most unfortunate thing is the long absence of Ahin Babu owing to his illness from Malaria. We wish him back on the stage. Never in his career, did he ever put the audience to any cause of annoyance. He is a popular and powerful actor and his make-up is the best on the Bengali stage.

'Ramer Sumati' under the direction of Mr.

Satoo Sen staged in Jan 22, 1944 with Suhasini as Narayani was attended with success.

Mr. Ayes Kanta Bakshi's "Adhikar" is the last piece staged on Sep. 14, 1944.

IV NATYA-BHARATI

Naya Bharati was started by Raghunath Mullick, who was some time ago lessee of Rungmahal. It opened with Tatinir Bichar on Aug. 5, 1939, and became a place of attraction when Ahin Babu joined it on Oct. 14, 1939.

After Nazrul's opera "Madhumala" gave some entertainment, Sachin Sen Gupta's drama "Sangram O Santi" was staged on Dec. 23, 1939 with Ahin Babu as Chandra Sekhar, Ratin Banerjee as Abinash, Jahar Gangoolee as Nityananda, Santosh Sinha as Manohar Ray and Ranibala as Protima.

Ahindra Babu left for Bombay on Aug. 3, 1940, just after he appeared as Dr. Bikramaditya in Sen Gugta's Nursing Home with Ranibala as Kuntala, (staged on 13-6-40), and Nirmalendu Lahiri took his place appearing as Madhab Roy in Jaladhr's Sithir Sindur on Aug. 24, 1940.

The next piece of attraction was Jaladhar's P. W. D. staged in Oct. 1, 1940, in which Durgadas Banerjee took the part of Mr. Sen,

Nirmalendu Lahiri of Rai Bahadoor, Ratin of Soumen, Santosh Singha as Sanat and Ranibala as Anjali.

Ayes Kanta Bakshi's "Rehearsal" was put on boards on 28-5-41 under Durgadas Banerjee's direction with Durgadas as Natanath and Ahindra Choudhury as Kumar Bahadoor.

Durgadas Babu left and Ahin Babu mounted Monoj Bose's Plavan on July 24, 1941 with himself as a Nilamber Roy, Ratin as Kamalesh, Santosh Singha as Brojalal and Ranibala as Nisarani.

Mr. Mohendra Gupta's "Kankabatir Ghat" staged on Sept. 25, 1941 was the next success, but Mr. Raghunath Mullick transferred his interest to one Mr. Muralidhar Chatterjee and Mr. Sisir Mullick as working partner began to manage the Theatre. Ahin Babu, Ranibala Santosh Singha, Ratin Babu left for Rangmahal and a new set of artists came, with whom Mr. Mullick opened the first new drama "Dui Purush" of Tarasankar Banerjee on may 28, 1942 with Jogesh Chandra Chowdhury as Shibnarain, Rabi Roy as Mahabharata, Naresh Mitra as Gopinath, Chhabi Biswas as Nutbihari Jahar Gangoolee as Sushobhan, Probha Bimala, and Anjali Roy Kalyani All the parts were done well, especially Jogesh

Babu who was at his best and exemplary. But the success in the part was soon followed by his sad death and Monoranjan Babu appeared as Sibnarain after the fiftieth performance.

Patherdak of Tarasankar with Naresh Mitra as Raibahadur, Jahar Gangulee Nikhilesh Biswanath Bhaduri Dr. Chatterji, Mihir Bhattacharya as Atul, Rabi Roy as Bhaktaram, Prabha as Jyotirmoyi and Bechu Singh as Jatin was staged on Jan. 8. 1943.

Prabha was very natural and she approached now the correct standard in social dramas after so many years. After Profulla and some pieces were revived, Debdas dramatised by Sachin Sengupta was staged with Jahar as Debdas, Rabi Roy as Dharmadas, Naresh Mitra as Basanta, Biswanath Bhaduri as Bhuban, Sefalika Chandra Mukhi and Saraju as Parbati.

"Dhatree Panna" was the last drama staged in 1943 with Saraju in the main role, Probha as Sital Sena, Rabi Roy as Jagmal and Jahar as Banabeer. Saraju and Probha did wonderfully. Others also did well.

"Natya Bharati" after showing performances for some time under Mr. Sisir Mullick met with a sad fate. The lease for theatre was not renewed from 1944 and it has now become a Cinema House.

We are really sorry that a disciplinarian like Mr. Sisir Mullick had to discontinue theatre for want of a stage. Regular in payment of salaries and a perfect gentleman, he tried various improvements and had also many projects in mind. Mr. Satoo Sen was his able help-mate here as well.

MISCELLANEOUS.

I. Mitra Theatre.

Babus Jnanendra Mitra and Sisir Kumar Mitra brother and son of late Babu Mohendra Kumar Mitra with the help of Babu Sisir Kumar Bose opened Mitra Theatre at the Alfred stage with Barada Das Gupta's Sree Durga on April 2, 1926. Sales for the first two nights were unusually high but Hindu Mussulman riots in the locality affected those considerably and performances had to be suspended for a fortnight. Tara Sundari was in the main role supported by Nirmalendu Lahiri as Mahishashoor, Prokas Mustafi as Indra, Kusum Kumari as Kamkala and Dhiren Gangulee as Kuttus.

Kshirode Babu's Joyasreè and Bhupendra Banerjee's Derby Ticket were the new pieces put on boards and Chandrasekhar, Jana, Pratapaditya, Bibahabibhrat, Alibaba and Bhramar revived. In the last piece Natyacharya

Amrita Bose was in the role of **Krishnakanta** and Nripen Bose Haria. Sometime after, theatre removed to Monomohan Stage from Nov , and with the help of Babu Kshetra Mohan Mitra, * old pieces like Durgabati, Bangebargi, Bajirao etc were revived.

The theatre after continuing for some time came to a close in May 1927.

II. BENGAL THEATRES LTD.

"Maharastra" was staged at this Theatre on Sept. 20, 1925 with Nirmalendu Lahiri as Sadashiva and Kusum Kumari Gopika Bai.

At Ranga Mahal

85, Upper Chitpore Road.

In 1934 July Mahamanab by Mani Banerjee was staged.

Then "Rup Mahal" staged here Jaladhar Chatterjee's Atmahuti in July 1935 and Sachin Sen Gupta's Abul Hassan in Nov. 1935 with Durgadas Banerjee in the main role and Neroda as Ma Saheb.

In 1938, Uttara was staged under the direc-

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* Formerly Kshetro Babu did marvellously in these pieces esp, in the last when his Ranoji Sindhia was wonderfully acted with Sushilabala as Gautama and Basanta as Mastana (vide page 150, supra).

tion of Jashoda Ghose.

"Cheap Theatre" also showed some performances at Dharamtolla Street.

Art theatre introduced new dress with Karnarjoon as an improvement p. 181.

Addenda.

1. In page 17, Ananta Rao was done by Kisorimohan Kar not Radhamadhab.
2. In page 26, line 22, Mohit Goswami not Mohini Mohan and acted the part of Govinda Das.
3. In page 201, Jahar Gangulee appeared as Manash and not Monoj.
4. In page 274, Manjoo De appeared for Saswati and not Sareswati.
5. Page 139. Mirabai is the work of Basanta Chatterjee, not of Monmotha Roy.
6. In page 282, line 9, for Arati read 'Amarabati.'

CHAPTER XIX

(Conclusion)

In the foregoing pages of different volumes, we have shown how Girish by his indefatigable labours and supreme genius had carried both the Bengali Stage and the Bengali Drama from their crude beginnings to the astonishing height of consummate perfection and how Ardhendu Mustafi, Amrita Bose, Mahendra Bose, Amrita Mitra, each one a host in himself helped their great leader Girish. We have also seen how on Girish's death in 1912, the Stage sank into a low level.

Soon after, the popular actor Amarendranath also breathed his last and the Bengali stage grew stale day by day, when a new luminary rose and promised to be its reformer. Babu Sisir Kumar Bhaduri gave a new impetus to the Bengali Theatres and became the instrument to spur even Dani Babu from his stupor. Like a meteor Sisir rose partly for his skill and partly for the time that was in his favour. No other actor or manager received even a fraction of the help as Sisir got from the Bengali public in money and sympathy. No other artist also abused that trust so much as Sisir had done. The result is that he fell down also like a meteor within ten years of his career and by 1932 when the old Dani Babu died at the zenith of his glory and fame, the young Sisir had fallen into discount. The next few years no doubt saw Sisir emitting now and again flashes of light, but to all practical purposes he was more a fallen man.

Then came the time of Talkies and Theatre was in discount. But Bengal knows how to adapt itself to circumstances and has thus made Stage a practical imitation of the Talkies. Theatre is no doubt popular but it is no longer our national institution. The great Deshbandhu wanted to have a National Theatre but it is today a nursery of rovolting foreign ideas and sentiments that have greatly lowered the public tastes. Except the Star Theatre we have legitimate grievances against all theatres.

At such a time Babu Khetra Mohan Mittra, once a brilliant actor but then a retired man, rose from his life of inaction and once again

as if through message from above, started Girish Parishad to stage the great dramas of Girish and those of others of the same school. Mitter however had no money or stage but with a determination backed by the help of a few highly cultured gentlemen, with whom the present writer hearcily co-operated, staged the great social tragedy of Girish on four occasions on the boards of the Minerva Theatre, and proved to demonstration how Girish's dramas are ever new and of undiminished interest as any other modern drama of real merits and how the art of acting does not consist in the unnecessary and restive movements of the body, or bioscopic gestures, nor in straining the vocal organ to its highest pitch. Karunamoy and Saraswati, Dulal and Matangini Ghanosyam and Jobi of Mitter's Parishad as represented respectively by the present writer and Susila Sundari, Kanai Sankar and Giribala, Bankim Bhattacharya and Ascharyamoyee were not acting on the stage but appeared as if men and women of the middle-class gentry talking and acting in their practical lives. The sudden death of Mitter (on July 29, 1944) has, however, proved a staggering blow not only to the Parishad, but to the revival of the Bengali Stage. Heaven alone knows when the Bengali Stage will again attain its former position and glory not simply as a place of mere amusement but as a temple of education and culture that will take a prominent part in awakening the national consciousness of the people in every sphere of life,—social, political and religious.

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Apologia

For a variety of causes, over which the present writer had little control, the last part of this volume has been very concise, and references insufficient. Readers are requested not to take it amiss. Much of the ready matter had to be left out. Details about individual artists will be given as much as possible in Volume V which will come out immediately. Awaiting suggestions and co-operation.

AUTHOR.

Addenda.

By the time the whole book was ready, there have been some new performances on the stages.

"Bandanar Bieye" by Babu Monoranjan Bhattacherya was staged at Srirangam on Oct. 26, 1944. Mr. Sisir Bhaduri has also come back to the delight of the audience.

"Santan" by Banee Kumar will soon be staged at Rangmahal under the direction of Mr. Ahindra Chowdhury.

"Kedar Roy" has been revived at the Star with Mr. Rabindra Mohan Rai in the title role, from September.

At Minerva, Sachin Babu's "Rastra-Bipalab" was staged on Aug. 14, 1944 with Messrs Nirmalendu Lahiri as Joy Singha, Chhabi Biswas as Dara, Ratin Banerjee, as Aurangzeb, Sailen Chaudhury as Shajahan, Sarajubala as Roshenara and Ranibala as Jahanara.

Mahakabi Girish Chandra's 'Grihalaksmi' is being rehearsed for performance.

Errata.

Page 244, 4th line, the word "generally" should be added, as of late there have been professional actresses in Madras along with male artists to appear in female roles. Amongst the males, Mr. Sambandha Mudaliar is a great artist in female role.

Page 252, Part 2, 1st line, read 1287 B. S. for 1234 B. S.

Page 290 para 4, line 6, Mr. Biswanath Bhaduri appeared as Krishna, not Mr. Rabi Roy.

Page 294, line 22 the word 'India' should be substituted by 'America'.

Page 309, line 22, 'Dipali' should be read, but not 'Dipti'.

Page 309, line 24, read 'time' not 'write'.

Page 328, line 21, read 'Sarkar' for 'Sankar' See also page 326.

Further suggestions are invited for the next volume.